

choice

NOVEMBER 2007 • CHOICE.COM.AU



Factory outlets

You can score big bargains, but it's so easy to spend more than you meant to.



Gourmet sausages

They cost more, but do they taste better than your average Aussie snag?

On test

- + Fridges
- + Electric lawnmowers
- + Air conditioners
- + Juicers
- + Pumps for water tanks
- + DVD/HD recorders

Is your home carbon neutral?

Making a smaller footprint



Supermarket 'own brands' rated

Fairtrade: why it makes a difference

Buy the best and cheapest car insurance

145 PRODUCTS
RATED!

Food Safety Week's in November. But why won't they tell us how safe restaurant food really is?

Contents

News



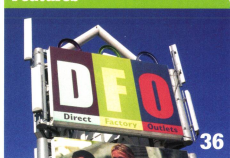
04 Consumer news

- + \$8 billion in risky investments
- + Come to Australia — for surgery
- + Is fructose a 'danger' sugar?
- + An environmentally friendly flush
- + Halogen downlights a fire risk
- + Controversy around Prexige recall
- + Losses to Bridgecorp
- + No surprise: kids prefer McDonald's.

08 Product news

- + iRobot Dirt Dog cleaner
- + Miro for internet TV viewing
- + AquaPac keeps your wallet safe.

Features



12 Going carbon neutral

Measure your home's carbon emissions — then reduce them.

17 Hygiene in restaurants

20 Fairtrade: what is it?

22 Supermarket brands on test

26 Finding the best sausage

29 Xmas shopping online

31 Buying car insurance

36 Shopping at factory outlets

Advice



10 Letters and emails

High standby energy use; making sense of dates on canned food; putting useful dates on beer; why some washing machines give you scratchy towels.

64 Recalls and bans

65 Campaigns

- + 'Traffic light' food labelling
- + Cheap and effective generic drugs.

67 Index

68 Hard Word



SUBSCRIBERS' HELPLINE CALL 02 9577 3399



EMAIL ausconsumer@choice.com.au

How CHOICE helps you. CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Because we pay full price for the products we test, we can remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry — our only aim is to give consumers the best possible information about buying products and services. Our income is only from subscriptions to our magazines and choice.com.au, and from other services we supply for the benefit of consumers. We're not a government body and we don't receive government funding.

We have laboratories in Marrickville, Sydney, that test everything from juicers to plasma TVs, coffee grinders to MP3 players and air conditioners. We test hundreds of products every year. There's no hidden agenda to our testing — we simply road-test products so that consumers like you don't get ripped off. CHOICE ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys.

CHOICE also has staff who research a wide range of consumer services — everything from the financial industry to the organic food business, supermarket practices to drug companies and pharmacies. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate quality and claims.

CHOICE has also always campaigned about consumer goods and services that affect your life. We lobby government and regulators on behalf of all consumers in Australia. CHOICE was established in 1959 and is a not-for-profit, non-party-political organisation.

CHOICE Best Buy

**BEST
BUY**

CHOICE nominates a product as a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has a Best Buy.

CHOICE Shopper

**CHOICE
SHOPPER**
BEST VALUE

Call 1300 360 655. All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number. CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.

Subscribe to CHOICE

Personal subscription 1 year \$78, 2 years \$145.
Company/institution 1 year \$125, 2 years \$239.
For subscription and renewal enquiries only, call 1800 069 552

Comment

Dodgy restaurants



With an estimated 5.4 million cases of food-borne illness in Australia each year, most of us have had the experience of eating something dodgy and suffering the results. And it's not something we'd care to repeat in a hurry.

Australians are eating out more often. Contaminated food from restaurants, commercial caterers, bakeries, takeaway outlets and fast-food chains was the likely culprit for around 65% of reported food poisoning outbreaks in Australia last year.

If you knew your local café or that trendy bistro you've waited months to get a table at stored food on the floor, prepared it in a toilet area or had a cockroach problem, you'd give it a wide berth. But there's no easy way for diners to find out if a restaurant has a filthy kitchen or if it passed its last health inspection. Most hygiene inspection information isn't made public until after there's been a conviction, usually many months after the fact — when it might be too late.

Australians are mostly left in the dark about these things, but if you're travelling to parts of the US, the UK, Canada, Denmark or New Zealand, you can find information on the hygiene of food premises on websites and displayed in the outlets, using grades or scores, smiley faces, traffic light colours, inspection results and even awards for excellent food safety practices.

CHOICE is calling on health ministers in Australia to introduce a similar system here, so Australian consumers can make informed choices about where they eat, based on hygiene standards. Not only would this reduce the risk of getting food poisoning, but overseas experience suggests it would also encourage restaurants and cafés to improve hygiene standards. It can also reward those venues that achieve and maintain high levels of food hygiene. To find out more, read our article on page 17.

And, just in time for Food Safety Week (12–19 November), we've prepared a letter that you can send to your health minister to show your support for publicising food safety inspection information. To join our campaign, go to www.choice.com.au/restauranthygiene. ■

Anny Friis
Editorial Director

On test

- 40 + Juicers** Some types of more expensive juicer give you better juice with more nutrients.
- 44 + DVD/hard disc recorders** A 160 GB hard disc drive plus a DVD recorder gives you hundreds of recording hours.
- 46 + Electric lawnmowers** Most do a fine job in a suburban backyard, but cordless models are extra-convenient.
- 50 + Air conditioners** Buy an energy-efficient one that'll keep you warm in winter as well as cool in summer.
- 53 + Fridges** Something for everyone: one tested model even comes with a built-in TV.
- 60 + Pumps for rainwater tanks** If you put in a tank to water your garden or flush the loo, you'll need a good pump to run it.



ELECTRIC MOWERS
PAGE 46

CHOICEextra.com.au

This is a free website for CHOICE magazine subscribers. It's an index of articles going back to Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs so that you can read many of them immediately. You log in with your subscriber number, which is above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine.

+ RISKY INVESTMENTS

\$8 billion in risky investments

If you open most newspapers' money sections, you'll probably see ads for a range of risky investments that haven't been assessed by an independent ratings agency. An Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) report reveals that over \$8 billion is invested in unrated debentures that aren't listed on a stock exchange.

Debentures are a way for companies to raise money from the public, to fund activities such as their property developments or to lend to companies that can't get finance from other sources such as banks. Investors are paid interest, but the security of their investment varies widely. Several of these unlisted and unrated debenture companies failed recently, including Australian Capital Reserve, Bridgecorp Finance and Fincorp (see page 7).

There are different types of unlisted and unrated debentures. Mortgage financing is one type, and makes up over one third of the \$8 billion in this sector. This doesn't include Bridgecorp (worth \$25 million), which went into administration in July 2007.

A further \$5 billion is in other types of unlisted and unrated debentures:

- \$2.7 billion is in 'debt capital funding' debentures. This is money raised by a company to run its operations.
- \$885 million is in 'finance' debentures. This is money used by the debenture company to lend to other people and businesses.
- \$680 million is in 'structured real estate' debentures, where the investor becomes a part owner in commercial or residential property.

- \$72.5 million is in the 'integrated property' category. This is where investors' money is used for the debenture company's own property transactions and developments (or those of a related company). Australian Capital Reserve (\$327 million) and Fincorp (\$201 million) were in the 'integrated property' sector, before they collapsed.

A full list of the unrated and unlisted debentures in operation is at www.asic.gov.au.

ASIC is proposing changes to the disclosure and advertising of these often risky investments. "The fundamental objective is to provide retail investors, and their advisers, with more investor information to make their decisions — before they invest and then on an ongoing basis," says Tony D'Aloisio, ASIC's Chairman.

ASIC's proposals include stopping companies offering these funds from using words such as 'safe' and 'secure' in their advertising. ASIC also proposes a requirement for debenture issuers to disclose a credit rating by a ratings agency like Moody's or Standards and Poor's or to state that they haven't been rated, and that investors risk losing some or all of their money. ■

ASIC is proposing changes to the advertising of these risky investments.



PHOTOGRAPHY GENE ROSS

+ MEDICAL TOURISM

Come to Australia — for surgery?

Medical tourism is a growth industry in countries such as Thailand, Singapore and India, with people travelling there to combine a holiday with having medical procedures, ranging from general health checks to cosmetic dentistry or a hip replacement. And the Australian Tourism Export Council and the Australian Health Export Industry Council are lobbying the Federal Government to help strengthen the industry here.

They argue that Australia has underutilised surplus capacity in the private sector — hospital beds, for example — that could be used by people wanting surgical procedures while on holiday. They want the

government to fund trade promotion to raise the profile of medical tourism in Australia.

This apparent surplus of beds in the private sector is at odds with the public system. National statistics recently published show that patients needing elective surgery had to wait a median of 32 days for a hospital bed in 2005–2006, up from 29 days in 2004–2005.

Rather than supporting medical tourism, CHOICE thinks the Federal Government should consider whether Australian taxpayer dollars would be more equitably spent on getting patients needing elective surgery off lengthy waiting lists and into those vacant private hospital beds. ■



PHOTO: RF

+ SUGAR DANGER

The fructose debate

Sugar is sugar is sugar, right?



According to some scientists, fructose is a sugar with hidden dangers. It's the type of sugar sourced from fruit, but using it as a sweetener in other foods is what's creating the current controversy, with new theories linking it to obesity and other related health issues.

Fructose is used a lot in the US, particularly in high-fructose corn syrup to sweeten soft drinks. It started to gain notoriety when it was observed that an increase in use of high-fructose corn syrup by food manufacturers coincided with an increase in obesity. But fructose also makes up 50% of sucrose (table sugar), so the problem potentially isn't just the corn syrup but sucrose as well. Naturally, fruit juice contains a lot of fructose, and while we already knew whole fruit was better and that the sugars and acids in juice weren't good for our teeth, there may be more reasons not to drink too much of it.

Studies have shown that fructose doesn't act like other sugars in the body, and is metabolised in a way that may lead to weight gain. It doesn't suppress ghrelin, the hunger hormone. When the stomach is empty, ghrelin levels are at their highest and produce the sensation of hunger. After you've eaten, ghrelin levels drop, leaving you feeling full. But because fructose has no effect on suppressing ghrelin, it also doesn't suppress hunger. So the danger is that you'll then eat more kilojoules because you still feel hungry.

Another problem with fructose, according to some studies, is its effect on the liver. Unlike other sugars, which are broken down by other organs of the body, fructose heads straight to the liver, just like fat — in other words, it's a carbohydrate that acts like a fat. The end result is fat being deposited on the liver. It's also been shown to cause high blood pressure, and an increase in LDL (bad) cholesterol.

So where does this theory leave fruit? Although fructose is fruit sugar, there's more to fruit than just fructose; for example, the dietary fibre it contains is enough to offset any harmful effects. So don't stop eating fruit. ■

+ HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

What are we flushing away?



Try to buy recycled tissues: it saves the most resources from an ecological point of view.

Your carefully selected toilet paper may be less environmentally friendly than you think — and it's hard to tell from the packaging alone. Only 5% of the toilet paper we flush away in Australia is made from recycled paper — the rest is virgin fibre from plantation or native-forest trees.

Recently Woolworths came under fire for selling tissue-paper products under its Select brand that were sourced from an Indonesian-based company, Asia Pulp and Paper (APP). The products are stamped with a 'sustainable forest fibre' logo, which isn't recognised by any independent authority and was created by APP — so it's pretty meaningless.

So which toilet paper is better for the environment and how do consumers know which product to trust?

First, try to buy recycled — it saves the most resources from an environmental point of view. A 2005 NSW government study found that for every tonne of paper that's recycled, 400 kg of greenhouse gas emissions are saved. This is because virgin fibre requires significant energy (and water) for harvesting raw materials, pulping and processing.

Second, the most widely recognised ecolabels for paper in Australia are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) logo, which means that any virgin fibre in the paper is derived from sustainably managed forests, and the Good Environmental Choice logo, which has standards for both recycled and plantation fibre products — but there's currently only a limited number of products with this logo. If you can't find recycled paper, plump for a brand carrying one of these logos. ■



© 1996 FSC A.C

+ HOME LIGHTING



Downlights could pose a risk to anyone if they come into contact with roof insulation.

Halogen downlights a fire risk

Poorly installed lighting sparks fire safety warnings.

The number of house fires caused by wrongly fitted halogen downlights is on the increase, according to recent figures released by the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade. In Melbourne alone, 57 examples have been recorded in the past 18 months — causing millions of dollars worth of damage.

Halogen downlights can heat up to 370°C. The lights become a fire hazard when they come into contact with roof insulation.

"The level of hazard would be very similar in other states," said a fire brigade spokesperson. "Any house that's using downlights could have this hazard, depending on the sort of insulation used in the roof space."

The blaze sparked by downlights tends to spread quickly within roof cavities, often undetected by fire alarms. This means crucial minutes are lost before residents or neighbours are aware of the danger.

While regulations are in place to ensure electricians install the lights properly, danger may arise when people buy do-it-yourself kits and attempt to install them without consulting a qualified electrician.

If you have halogen downlights, check that there's a clear gap between the lights and the insulation material in the roof space above. If you're not sure whether existing downlights have been installed correctly, get a qualified electrician to check them out. ■

+ DRUG RECALL

Prexige pulled

The urgent recall of osteoarthritis drug Prexige has been surrounded by controversy.



The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) cancelled Prexige's registration and initiated its recall on 11 August, after receiving eight reports since March of serious liver-related side effects associated with its use, including two deaths and two liver transplants. All forms of Prexige available in Australia (100 mg, 200 mg and 400 mg) were recalled, although the reported adverse reactions were specific to patients taking the 200 mg or 400 mg dose of the drug. The TGA warned patients to stop taking Prexige immediately and to discuss alternative treatments with their doctor. Patients were also advised to be assessed for any clinical or biochemical evidence of liver damage.

Almost six weeks before the TGA's recall decision, Novartis — the pharmaceutical company behind Prexige — contacted doctors, advising that the 200 mg dose was being replaced by a 100 mg dose. We asked Novartis if it knew at this point that the 200 mg dose was unsafe. A spokesperson told us the reason for taking Prexige 200 off the shelf and moving people to 100 was to ensure that patients had access to the lowest effective dosage — which is best medical practice — and that this was done as soon as Prexige 100 had received approval for registration from the TGA at the beginning of July.

The Prexige Product Information was revised to say, "The recommended dose of Prexige is 100 mg once daily. The dose should not be increased as this does not provide any additional benefit and may increase the risk of adverse events." Novartis also advised doctors to switch their patients on Prexige 200 mg to Prexige 100 mg "at their next consultation". With 30 tablets in a pack, some patients may not have found out until at least one month later. In retrospect, this is an alarmingly long time, considering the adverse events the patients were risking.

If you have any queries about Prexige or its recall call:

- TGA Information Line: 1800 004 599.
- Novartis Information Line: 1800 671 203. ■

HELP WANTED: ARE YOU CASHING IN YOUR HOUSE?

We need your help with an investigation into reverse mortgages and similar products that allow people aged 60 and over to borrow money against the value of their home.

If you've taken up or paid off a reverse mortgage or similar product, or are thinking of doing so, we'd love to hear from you. We'd like to hear about all kinds of experience, but are particularly interested to hear if you had any problems.

Please write to **Money Team, CHOICE**, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or send an email to reversemortgage@choice.com.au.



+ FINANCIAL PLANNERS

Planners recommended Bridgecorp

Until at least 2005, financial planners from PKF Chartered Accountants and Business Advisers recommended high-risk investments in Bridgecorp Finance, the property investment company whose parent (Bridgecorp Holdings) went into receivership in July 2007.

One investor told CHOICE that after advice from PKF in 2005, he believed his investment was as safe as government bonds. But that wasn't the case. Bridgecorp wasn't an authorised deposit-taking institution; rather, it was at the high-risk end of the property investment, debenture and unsecured notes market, which included companies like Australian Capital Reserve and Fincorp, both of which have also since collapsed. Bridgecorp offered 'secured and unsecured term investments' and on-lent money to property developers at high interest rates. For example, some money was lent to the failed property group Westpoint.

PKF was also Bridgecorp's independent auditor from 2003 until it went into receivership. Bridgecorp's previous auditor saw the warning signs long before: Grant Thornton resigned as auditor in 2003 because of fears the company would collapse. Then, in August 2005, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission placed a temporary stop order on Bridgecorp's prospectus, before preventing it from raising further funds from existing debenture holders, and from accepting rollovers of existing funds, in April 2006.

PKF told CHOICE its audit and financial planning practices operate as independent and distinct businesses with separate management and governance. "PKF's financial planners had no access to any of the firm's audit files and no conflict of interest existed under Australian law," PKF said.

"Based on independent third-party research, PKF's financial planning practice was one of many firms that included Bridgecorp as an accepted investment product. Other financial planning firms also recommended investment in Bridgecorp at the time, based on third-party research," the company said.

We asked PKF how many clients and how much of their money was invested in Bridgecorp, and whether any was invested when the company collapsed, but it wouldn't discuss clients' investments or specific cases.

PKF said it wasn't the only planning company recommending Bridgecorp, but the Financial Planning Association hasn't received complaints or evidence that other planners' clients were exposed to losses from the collapse. CHOICE would like to hear from readers who were recommended Bridgecorp by financial planners — email investments@choice.com.au. ■

+ FAST FOOD

Brandwashing our children

It's official — our kids are brainwashed into putting branded food in their mouths. A study in the US has confirmed that clever marketing and branding influence even the youngest of customers.

The study examined the effects of marketing and branding on preschool-aged children, by testing the influence of the McDonald's brand on food choices. The children tasted food in McDonald's wrappers and the same food in plain wrappers, and were asked if one tasted the same as or better than the other. The foods were a McDonald's hamburger, a chicken McNugget, McDonald's French fries, reduced-fat milk and carrots. The children preferred the taste of the food they thought came from McDonald's — even the carrots and the milk.

Researchers found that children with more TVs at home, and who ate food from McDonald's more often, were more likely to prefer the taste of food and drinks if they thought they were from McDonald's. In addition, 76% of households had toys from McDonald's. ■



In brief ..

Low-GI diet fights flab

A Cochrane

Review of studies from five countries, comparing the effects of



low-GI diets on overweight adults, showed that those on a low-GI diet lost an average of 1 kg more than those on a conventional diet. Low-GI diets may also improve heart health, as total cholesterol decreased for the low-GI group. "People find low GI diets easier to stick to because they satisfy their hunger, so they may be more sustainable for long-term weight loss," review co-author Elizabeth Elliott said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GENE ROSS

Complaining made much easier

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission now has seven approved external dispute resolution schemes to deal with complaints about the financial industry. They are: the Banking and Financial Services Ombudsman, Credit Ombudsman Service, Credit Union Dispute Resolution Centre, Financial Industry Complaints Service, Insurance Brokers Disputes, Insurance Ombudsman Service (all on one phone number, 1300 780 808) and the Financial Co-operative Dispute Resolution Scheme (1300 139 220). You can also go to www.asic.gov.au/search (or phone 1300 300 630) to ensure the financial services provider you plan to do business with is appropriately licensed.

+ PATIO CLEANER

iRobot Dirt Dog cleaner



IROBOT DIRT DOG 130

Price \$249

Distributor Salton Australia

Weight 2.6 kg

If you've got a messy workshop or patio, and plenty of time, the Dirt Dog might be your new best friend.

Coming from the same stable as the IROBOT Roomba robot vacuum cleaner, it's marketed as a workshop cleaner, suitable for clearing up dust, debris and dirt — even small nuts and bolts — from hard floors (including industrial carpets), patios and decks. Unlike the Roomba, the Dirt Dog has no built-in vacuum — it has large rotating brushes to sweep up the dirt, and a bigger collection bin. Otherwise it's quite similar — just charge the battery, push the start button and let it go.

We put it to the test on a workshop floor scattered with sawdust and small nails, screws, nuts and washers. We

also tried it in a paved courtyard scattered with 100 g of leaves, small twigs and loose dirt.

Good points

- It navigated all obstacles successfully.
- It picked up 84% of the sawdust and other litter from the workshop floor.

- It picked up nearly all the leaves, twigs and dirt from the courtyard (but the bin filled up twice while doing this).
- It ran for over 40 minutes on a full charge.
- It's very easy to use.

Bad points

- Some debris, such as a screw, twigs and long blades of grass, became stuck or tangled in the brushes and had to be manually removed.
- It wasn't very good at picking up flat items, such as washers.
- It's noisy — about as noisy as a loud vacuum cleaner.
- It takes a long time to clean an area compared to doing the job yourself with a broom.

CHOICE verdict

It's rather slow and noisy, but if you have a moderately messy workshop or patio floor that regularly needs cleaning or sweeping — and you can close the door to muffle the noise from the rest of your family — the Dirt Dog could be worth considering, even with its price tag of \$249. Otherwise, sweeping up with a broom will be cheaper, quicker and quieter. ■

+ INTERNET TV

Miro on the video world

The internet is full of video content that you can view free. Video-sharing website YouTube has become a household name, but it's just one of many sources. But with thousands of internet TV 'channels' available, how do you find and manage content you like?

One way is to use an internet TV program like Miro, which is free to download and install. Miro was designed to be a one-stop shop for finding, viewing and managing online video in many different file formats — and its creators intend it to be as easy to use as turning on a TV.

Miro is the core project of the Participatory Culture Foundation (PCF), a not-for-profit organisation that aims to support independent creativity online. It helps you find, watch and subscribe to free internet TV channels, including video podcasts and other types of video feed.

You can use Miro to search YouTube, Google Video, Revver, Blogdigger, DailyMotion, Blip TV, Mefedia,

Yahoo! and Yahoo! Video. When you find a video you like, Miro will download and save it to your PC. This means it's a lot smoother when you play it back, as streaming it direct from the web means it's affected by the speed of the download.

Downloads automatically expire after five days, which frees up room on your hard drive, although you can change this setting if you want to. You can also keep individual files permanently.

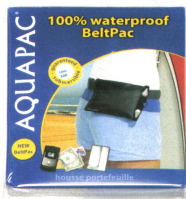
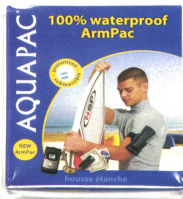
Miro comes in versions for Windows, Mac OS X and Linux. Download it from the website (getmiro.com), which also promotes the Make Internet TV website (makeinternet.tv) — a must-see for anyone wanting to produce videos for online.

See the full report on Miro in the November issue of CHOICE Computer. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to choice.com.au/magazines. ■

Miro helps you find, watch and subscribe to free internet TV channels, including vodcasts.

+ WATERPROOF WALLET

Beach security



AQUAPAC ARMPAC

Price \$49

Contact www.nextdestination.com.au

AQUAPAC BELTPAC

Price \$61

Contact www.nextdestination.com.au

AQUAPAC waterproof cases offer a solution to a problem we've all faced at the beach or pool: what to do with your valuables while you're swimming. Do you hide them under your towel or bury them in the sand and hope no thieves come looking? If only you could safely carry your money, keys and mobile phone into the water... Well, now you can.

We tested the AQUAPAC ArmPac and BeltPac: small, padded, plastic cases that strap to your arm or waist respectively. Each case has a seal called an Aquaclip, which is easy to use and locks the case tightly shut. We loaded the cases with an average-sized mobile phone, two credit cards and a set of keys, then put them to the test.

- **Using the cases** It was hard to fit our standard load into the ArmPac. After squeezing in the phone and credit cards, we couldn't fit a car key with built-in remote, but other standard-sized keys were OK. Our tester also found the ArmPac hard to attach to his upper arm. The BeltPac, being a bit bigger, took our entire load easily. It's also easier to wear and to retrieve items from while wearing it. It has a lanyard if you want to wear it round your neck.
- **Waterproof?** We put each loaded case into a tub of water and found that they float easily; useful if they happen to slip off while you're swimming. We submerged the cases in a metre of water for an hour using a weight, and also floated them in ocean waves. No water got into either case. Each case claims to be waterproof to 10 m, but we didn't test them at that depth.
- **Sandproof?** We buried both cases in sand for an hour. No sand got into the cases, as long as they were rinsed off before opening — otherwise some sand can migrate in when you open them.

If you're looking for a safe way to carry your valuables while you take a dip — or when you go boating, or bushwalking in wet weather — these AQUAPAC cases will do the job. ■

It was hard to fit everything into the ArmPac, but the bigger BeltPac took it all easily.

Coming ...

Sparkling wine for Christmas

Expert tasters sampled 67 sparkling whites, reds, rosés and champagnes — and there's a good drop out there for every taste, budget and occasion. The expensive French champagnes weren't all favoured by the experts — some of the top-scoring wines in the test came from Tasmania. What was that rumour we heard about 'Méthode Tasmannoise' taking on the world?

80 cm televisions

An 80 cm TV might not be big enough for some television fanatics, but if you only have a small living room, or don't want an entire wall taken over by a jumbo TV, this is a very 'livable' size. But we're still finding TVs without an inbuilt digital tuner — two in this batch of tested models don't have one, which doesn't make sense so close to analogue broadcast shutdown.



Handheld GPS



Handheld GPS devices can help you get back safely from a long walk in the bush, but don't rely on it alone: take along a compass and a good map — just in case. One of these GPS units can reveal your position if you're lost, or record every step you take so you can find your way back. Also, if you know the co-ordinates of a destination, anywhere in the world, it'll show you how to get there on foot.

Write or email — we want to hear from you.

Your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or service provider interest us too. See opposite for how to contact us.

Scratchy towels



■ After having changed from a top- to a front-loading washing machine, I found my towels, which had stayed soft after washing in the top

loader, have become hard and scratchy.

I assume this is due to the front-loader powder I'm now using, or is it a common problem with front loaders? Can you suggest a solution?

Also, can you tell me if most front loaders are unable to handle single items? With delicates you often only have one article that you want to wash separately, which isn't possible in mine.

Janice, Queensland

CHOICE says Unfortunately, one of the downsides of front loaders (and modern water-efficient top loaders, for that matter) is that they often produce scratchy towels. That's because the clothes are generally tumbling through just a little water rather than floating through lots, like in an older-style top loader. And to get the fibres nicely fluffed up, towels need to be immersed in water.

Another reason could be that your front loader is in fact too water-efficient, in that it uses too little water for the rinse, leaving detergent residues in the wash. This is where a CHOICE report can help you choose a machine that's good at rinsing while still being water-efficient; the water rating labels only tell you about water use, not rinse efficiency.

Short of drying your towels for hours in an energy-guzzling clothes dryer to get them soft — and generating more than 3 kg of greenhouse gas in the process — you can try the following to help reduce the scratchy effect:

- Adding an extra rinse to your towels wash.
- Using a gentler program that uses more water.
- Lowering the spin speed.
- Adding half to one cup of white vinegar to the fabric softener dispenser (don't be tempted to use fabric softener, as this will lower the fabric's ability to absorb water).
- Shaking your towels out vigorously, or putting them in the dryer on the cooling cycle for a few minutes before you hang them out to dry.
- Taking them off the line when still a little damp and drying them off in the dryer.

As for a front loader's ability to wash a single item, many if not most washers of this type won't. More precisely, they won't spin, because a single item is detected as an out-of-balance load, which the machine can't distribute evenly around the drum.

Premium beers

■ I'd like to compliment you on your excellent report on premium beers. However, you seem to have missed a key difference between bottle-conditioned beers, like the Coopers range, and mainstream beers that use preservatives to keep them drinkable.

The reason Coopers have a 'best after' date is for this very reason: it improves in the bottle over time, in a similar manner to a fine wine, and indeed shouldn't be consumed until the conditioning process is complete.

Many boutique beers fall into this category, and it's unreasonable to expect a use-by date. Probably a recommended cellaring period would be more appropriate (as for wines); however, it's not overly common that beers would be kept for longer periods unless



the consumer was actively trying to age the beer. More appropriate is that the beer is kept away from light and cool.

Scott, Victoria

CHOICE says We agree that a 'best after' date can be helpful on bottle-conditioned ales. Coopers told us that the main reason any beer deteriorates is oxidation, but bottle-conditioned ales contain live yeast that mops up any dissolved oxygen. As a result these ales have a longer shelf life than lagers. However, if there's no indication of how long it'll remain in peak condition once it reaches this 'best after' date, consumers still won't know whether the beer they're buying is fresh. We'd like to see Australian brewers follow the big US brewer Anheuser-Busch and give the date on which the beer was brewed.

Too much energy used on standby power

■ I recently bought a Ryobi 2000 W Slide Compound Mitre Saw. After I set it up and did a few trial cuts, I left for a number of hours before returning for more work, when I noticed that the handle was warm. Suspecting a fault, I rang the distributor and was told that this was normal: the saw uses power even when not in use. This is presumably a transformer for the laser.

At a time when everyone is trying to reduce passive power use, why manufacture a machine like this? I wouldn't have bought it had I known it uses power all the time.

John Kerr

CHOICE says The Ryobi distributor we spoke to couldn't tell us how much power this saw uses on standby, but said he'd never had such an inquiry before. Judging by the concerns in this and the next letter, he's likely to get more.

More energy wasted on standby

■ I bought the Sunbeam EM5600 espresso machine on your recommendation and agree with all the good points you mentioned. However, I was surprised to find it was still warm the day after I'd used it, although I'd turned it off at the switch on the front, as I was supposed to.

Sunbeam told me that it's normal — when the machine is switched off on the front panel, it goes into standby mode, where it then uses some energy for the convenience of heating up quickly when you next want a coffee. Unless you turn the machine off completely at the mains, this could add up considerably.

Also, the only way that the LCD clock in the front panel is going to keep the correct time is if it's fed the energy it consumes on standby: pretty wasteful time!

I'm so surprised that in this day and age of making machines more energy-efficient, this is put on the market.

Otto Lechner



CHOICE says
Espresso machines in active standby mode consume a great deal of energy running a cyclic program to ensure the heating unit remains at the

temperature required for optimum performance, and for the clock, which may be necessary for use with a timer.

Sunbeam told us this espresso machine used only 3 W when switched off at the front (to power the LCD clock). If left on at the front, though, it would go into a standby or 'power saving' mode in which it would stay warm, consuming around 27 W.

However, we found, just as Otto did, that the machine we tested stayed warm and used in excess of 20 W of energy for 24–28 hours after it was switched off. We think that's excessive. In future tests we'll measure and publish the machines' standby energy use.

Thumbs up!

■ Dana Lowe is very impressed by the customer service she received — above and beyond what she expected. When her pharmacy was unable to get more of the "great little hats" she'd bought earlier, the distributor, CWA Cashmink Accessories, sent her, free of charge, two more hats in the colours she loved. "A truly generous person, a bit of a rarity these days," she says.

■ Michelle Turner gives her Thumbs up to Carman's, which sent her three boxes of muesli bars, a total of 18, to make up for two bars she'd had in a packet that were about half the usual size.

Address your letters to Thumbs up! at the address below.

LETTER OF THE MONTH**Canned food labelling**

■ I've been curious for years about the ambiguous expiry codes on some tinned foods. Today I tried to 'refresh' the items in my pantry and found that I had no idea what the expiry dates were for half the items in my cupboard. I tried searching the net but couldn't find an easy reference. Each company codes its products its own way, and many weren't even listed.

For example, a can of spaghetti sauce, which I thought should have a use-by date because it contained meat, had no recognisable date. The only code I could find was E71 0920 B, 3F70K — I can't fathom how that would translate into an expiry date that's useful for consumers.

Can you please advise how to read the ambiguous codes printed on tinned foods, or how to otherwise be sure the food in my cupboard is still OK?

John Freestone

CHOICE says The number on the bottom of the can is a packaging code. You can contact the manufacturer with this code and it can advise the packaging date.

A food product must be date-marked if it has a shelf life of less than two years. Products with a longer shelf life (like canned foods) don't require a 'best before' date by law, and therefore don't always have one. More information on this is available from Food Standards Australia New Zealand (www.foodstandards.gov.au).

CHOICE would like to see the date of packaging listed on long-life food products, so consumers can make an informed decision at the point of sale and when checking their cupboards.

To thank you for taking the time to write to us, CHOICE awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner receives *How to Clean Practically Anything*, or any other book of his choice from the list on choice.com.au/books. We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract.



Email letters@choice.com.au or mail to:
Letters, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204



COURTESY OF JOHN FREESTONE



Is your home carbon neutral?

Living a low-emission life is a tall order, but there are four steps you can take to reduce your environmental footprint. CHOICE investigates.



nutshell

► The steps to reducing your carbon footprint are: measure it (see page 14), reduce it, use renewable energy and, as a last resort, offset your carbon contribution.

► Efficient energy consumption can reduce your home's carbon emissions and save you money, which you can use to buy renewable energy.

Recently, a young man approached the company Climate Positive and asked if he could offset the environmental damage his grandfather's 70 years on the planet had caused. This is an unusual example, but it highlights the fact that rarely, if ever, have environmental concerns been so high on our personal agendas.

Just a year ago, it was hard to imagine being offered carbon neutral phone calls, a 'green ticket' for a rock festival, or the option of swapping your credit card reward points for greenhouse gas offsets. Now we're being presented with carbon neutral options at every turn and, in some circles, greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters are considered environmental and almost social criminals (the ABC recently unleashed 'carbon cops' to catch them).

Carbon emissions matter because climate change is caused by an increase in greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere, and carbon dioxide is a greenhouse gas. The greenhouse effect is the phenomenon whereby certain gases build up in the lower atmosphere and prevent heat escaping into space, acting like a 'blanket' of gases around the earth. This increases the planet's average temperature. Carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and manufactured gases such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) are the main GHGs caused by human activity.

Research by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that GHG emissions result in the earth getting warmer, sea levels rising, glaciers melting, and changes in weather patterns causing more severe

droughts, heatwaves, floods and storms, changes in rainfall patterns and a higher likelihood of bushfires.

Australia's poor record

Most of us want to help the planet and reduce the damage we're responsible for, and we certainly don't want to be among the world's highest greenhouse gas polluters, but where should we start?

Australia has the fourth highest level of GHG emissions, per capita, in the world, as the graph above right shows. At 25.6 tonnes per person, we emit more than twice the EU average and four times the world average. Per capita figures are calculated by dividing the total emissions Australia produces, including emissions from industry and agriculture, by our population. Because all such emissions are included, the per capita figure is much higher than individual household emissions (which average around 14 tonnes). The Australian agricultural, business and export sectors, as well as the government, need to take responsibility for GHG emissions too.

There's a link between emissions and income per capita; people in wealthy countries (and wealthy suburbs in Australia) are likely to have higher emissions.

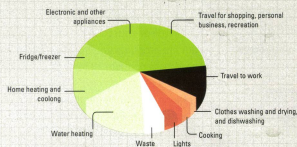
Four of the five highest per capita emitters are gulf countries Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain, which have small populations and export highly GHG-intensive commodities.

If you look at total emissions rather than per capita

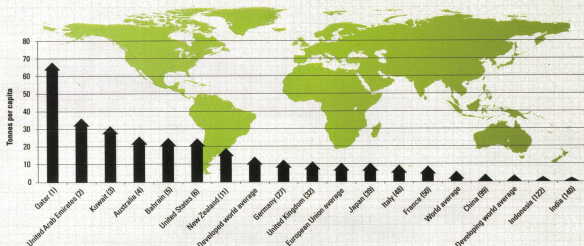
Where greenhouse gas emissions come from

Main household culprits

The pie chart shows the main contributors to consumers' direct greenhouse gas emissions, which make up about 30% of our total carbon emissions. They include transport/travel, but not other 'consumer' emissions, such as those from the production and transport of food. This is average data; your lifestyle, where you live, your income (or what you do with it) and your activities all play a part in your personal impact on the environment. Source: *Global Warming Cool It 2007*, Australian Greenhouse Office.



World ranking of per capita greenhouse gas emissions



Source: World Resources Institute, 2005, using data from 2000. Numbers in brackets are the country's per capita greenhouse gas emission world 'ranking'.

ILLUSTRATION: CYNTHIA NG

figures, you get a different view. While China, with a large population, had comparatively low per capita emissions, the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency recently ranked China's total emissions as the world's highest, with the US in second place.

The 2005 World Resources Institute study (using data from 2000) found that Australia, which produces around 1.5% of world GHGs, was in sixteenth place in terms of overall emissions. Using Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO) data, we calculate that Australia's carbon dioxide equivalent emissions rose by 1.4% between 2000 and 2005.

More than just home energy use

'Indirect emissions' contribute more to our carbon footprint than our home energy use. The Australian Conservation Foundation says the majority of consumer-generated GHGs result from the production, transport and distribution of goods, services and the food we buy, rather than household energy use (home energy use contributes about 20% of our emissions, and transport/travel 10%):

- Food, including eating out and in particular buying

meat and dairy products (their production is water-intensive, with about 200 L of water needed to produce a 150 g steak) is responsible for 28% of our GHG pollution.

- Goods and services, such as clothes, books, magazines, tobacco and alcohol, contribute 29%.
- Home construction and renovations contribute 12%.

So what can we do to address these problems?

The ACF recommends personal actions like shopping smarter, buying fewer things and wasting less. More details are available in ACF's consumption atlas at www.acfonline.org.au. Companies that provide goods and services we consume also have some responsibility to cut their emissions, and to inform consumers which products have lower associated emissions. Very few companies do this. >



WANT MORE INFORMATION?

- Australian Conservation Foundation: www.acfonline.org.au.
- Australian Greenhouse Office: www.greenhouse.gov.au and www.australia.gov.au/climateclever.

Per capita, Australia emits greenhouse gases at more than twice the EU average and four times the world average.

Shop smarter, buy fewer products and waste less. All this will help to reduce your greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

STEP 1 Measure your carbon footprint

The table below helps calculate your household's greenhouse pollution from energy and transport (they're about 30% of your total carbon footprint — the rest is from the products you buy; see *More than just home energy use* on page 13 for more). You'll need:

- Some recent electricity bills — ideally for the last four quarters, to get an accurate picture of your annual use. Electricity consumption is measured in kilowatt hours (kWh). In some states, bills show the emissions from electricity use.
- Recent gas bills. As above, but measured in megajoules (except in WA, where consumption is expressed in units).
- An estimate of your annual petrol expenditure and air travel. Websites like www.mapcrow.info calculate distances between cities.
- A calculator to multiply and add these figures.

The average Australian household generates about 14 tonnes of GHG emissions each year from energy consumption and transport. How do you compare? You don't need a precise figure; this quiz is a starting point. More detailed calculators and information are available on websites like www.acfonline.org.au (search for 'emissions calculator') and www.australia.gov.au/climateclever, or you could pay for a home energy audit (typically \$100–\$300).

STEP 2 Reduce consumption, increase efficiency

There are steps you can take to use less energy, be more efficient and save money. Each tonne of greenhouse gas avoided saves you anywhere from \$130 to \$470, depending on the type of energy. For detailed tips and information, get the Australian Greenhouse Office *Global Warming Cool It* guide, available at www.greenhouse.gov.au. Here are some tips to get you started:

Appliances

- Look for energy and water-efficient models** at www.energyrating.gov.au and www.waterrating.gov.au. Check star ratings and the energy and water efficiency scores in CHOICE tests.
- Clothes washing** Only use the machine when it's full; choose one that uses the least energy and water (check its star ratings) and wash in cold water.
- Clothes drying** Use a clothes line if possible.
- Dishwashers** Only use it when it's fully loaded, try a shorter wash cycle if dishes aren't very dirty, and clean the filter to maintain performance.

Electronics

- According to the Australian Greenhouse Office, a large-screen TV, used for six hours a day, can generate more GHGs per year than a fridge. So don't leave the TV on when you're not watching it.

How do YOU measure up? Calculate your household's direct carbon emissions.

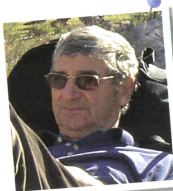
Activity/energy source	Measurement	Your annual consumption (units)	Multiplication factor	Greenhouse emissions (kg)
Natural gas or LPG	Megajoules		0.07	
Or LPG if you buy it by the litre	Litres		1.7	
LPG units (WA only)	Units		0.24	
Electricity (A)	Kilowatt hours		1	
Oil or kerosene	Litres		3	
Wood used in a slow-combustion heater	Kilograms		0.23	
Wood used in an open fire	Kilograms		5	
Petrol	Litres		2.6	
LPG	Litres		1.8	
Diesel fuel	Litres		3	
Air travel	Kilometres		0.18 (B)	
Food and garden waste (not composted)	Kilograms		1	
TOTAL				

1
Insert your consumption figures in this column.

2
Multiply your consumption figure by this number.

3
The result of the multiplication is your greenhouse gas emission in kilograms for each activity. Divide it by 1000 to get tonnes, to compare with the household average of 14 tonnes.

Source: *Global Warming Cool It 2007*, Australian Greenhouse Office.
(A) If you buy 100% GreenPower, you can enter 0 for electricity emissions in your home. If you buy 50% GreenPower, reduce your electricity emissions figure by half, etc.
(B) To include the full warming effects of flying, use the calculator at www.australia.gov.au/climateclever.



Average greenhouse gas emissions

Wal lives in Lindfield, NSW. 60% of his two-person household's GHGs comes from electricity; at 8600 kWh per year, his electricity bill (and usage) is higher than average. The rest of the household's emissions come mainly from petrol (30%), with air travel and domestic waste making up the remaining 10%.

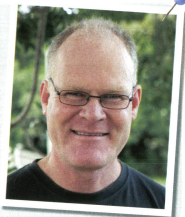
As well as improving his household's energy efficiency and considering how he can use the car less, Wal could reduce his household's emissions by about 50% by buying GreenPower instead of normal (coal-based) electricity. 100% GreenPower would cost him around \$230 a year from one of CHOICE's Best Buys (June 2007, CHOICE), in addition to the standard electricity rates.

High greenhouse gas emissions

Neill's two-person Sydney household's electricity consumption, at 3500 kWh per year, is around half of the national average and accounts for just 17% of his household's emissions. Also on the positive side, he uses natural gas — which is less harmful to the environment than electricity per unit of energy consumed — for both room and water heating, and for cooking. 16% of the household's emissions are from driving, but at 60%, air travel is by far the biggest contributor.

"In the last year, we travelled about 70,000 km, including flights to the UK and a couple of internal European flights," Neill says. "The contribution our flying made to our carbon footprint [about 12.6 tonnes] certainly surprised me. However, these trips are important — for work, to see family and friends, and of course for a holiday.

"The idea of buying carbon offsets to compensate for the flights is appealing — if they're real. If I buy some plantation trees, for example, I want to know that they wouldn't have been planted anyway, regardless of the offset scheme, and that they'll be looked after for their full life." (For more on tree planting and other offset schemes, see *Step 4: Buy carbon offsets*, page 16.)



PHOTOGRAPHY: GENE RUSS

- Standby power contributes about 10% of home electricity use, according to the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF). When practical, turn appliances off at the power point — the ACF says this'll save \$100 per year. If you can't, at least turn the appliance off.

Heating and cooling

- Insulate ceilings and walls.
- Provide external and internal shading for windows
- Insulation, shading, draughtproofing and fans will reduce the need for air conditioning.
- Air conditioning is very energy-intensive for cooling, so buy an efficient model and limit its use.
- Turning up the thermostat by 1°C in summer and down by the same amount in winter can reduce heating and cooling costs by around 10%.
- Electric water heating is a major greenhouse pollutant. High-efficiency gas water heaters and electric or gas solar systems are better for the environment. Solar water heaters start from around \$2000 and can cost up to \$5000, plus another \$700 for installation, but government rebates of up to \$1000 are available nationally (details at www.greenhouse.gov.au/rebates), and some states have further rebates.
- Further hot water savings can be achieved by taking shorter showers and installing a low-flow (three-star) showerhead.

Lighting

- Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) and LED lights use less energy than incandescent bulbs, which will be phased out by 2010, and can also save you money.
- Over its life, conservatively, a typical CFL saves around \$45, 300 kg of greenhouse gases and avoids the cost of four or more incandescent globes.

Travel

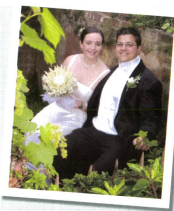
- Travel to work, shopping and recreation are big contributors to household emissions.
- Every kilometre of car travel avoided saves up to half a kilogram of greenhouse gas. Walking, cycling and public transport are more environmentally friendly than cars. Cycling 10 km each way to work once a week instead of driving saves hundreds of dollars in transport costs and hundreds of kilograms of greenhouse pollution a year.
- Buy a greener car. www.greenvehicleguide.gov.au has rankings of emissions and pollution from new cars, and fuel consumption of secondhand cars.
- Drive efficiently (keep your revs down, your tyres at the right pressure, and don't carry excess weight).
- LPG fuel generates about 30% fewer greenhouse gas emissions per litre than petrol.
- Flights: can you reduce the number of flights you take? Consider buying carbon offsets for the rest. >

Every kilometre of car travel avoided saves up to half a kilogram of greenhouse gases.

Green wedding

Clare and Johann, who live in WA, tried to reduce the carbon impact of their wedding. "It wasn't carbon neutral, but the potentially negative environmental impacts were mostly either avoided or offset by the choices we made," Clare says. "I researched the various carbon offset companies and found Climate Friendly didn't use trees as an offset, and took more than airplane fuel carbon content into account when calculating CO₂ emissions, using the appropriate multiplying factors for other gases."

The couple bought the company's wedding package, using it to offset guests' long-distance flights. "We offset around 18 tonnes of CO₂, for around \$360. The response to our efforts at the wedding was very positive and quite a few people learnt about the impact travel can have, and what can be done to reduce or offset that impact."



STEP 3 Buy GreenPower electricity

If you can't generate your own clean electricity (by installing solar panels, for example), you can reduce the emissions from your household's electricity use with accredited GreenPower, available from electricity retailers and offset companies. The average household could pay around \$200 extra per year for 100% accredited GreenPower, or around \$4 per week — less if you manage to reduce your electricity use.

When you buy GreenPower, the electricity you use is replaced in the national grid by energy from new (post-1997) renewable sources. This reduces the proportion of energy from coal being added to the grid and increases the demand for, and investment in, new clean energy. It doesn't mean you'll directly receive electricity from a different source, or that your appliances will be running off green electrons, though.

However, not all renewable energy is the same:

- Some accredited products include only a small proportion of GreenPower — the rest comes from old hydro generators or fossil fuel generators. Suppliers are required to tell you the percentage of accredited GreenPower in their products.
- There are big price differences between retailers, with GreenPower ranging in price from no additional cost to 11 cents per kWh above standard rates.
- The energy source affects its price. For example, solar power is likely to be more expensive than biomass energy.

Over 500,000 households have switched to GreenPower, with nearly 1000 new customers signing up daily. There's more information and a price comparison in the June 2007 issue of CHOICE.

STEP 4 Buy carbon offsets for your GHG

If you've reduced your electricity, gas and petrol consumption and bought GreenPower, the next step in your quest to become 'carbon neutral' is to buy offsets. This means paying someone else to reduce their emissions or to remove GHGs from the atmosphere. But the offset market is new and unregulated, with big differences in the price and quality of offers available.

Here are some questions to ask offset providers:

- What projects or activities does my money pay for?
- Is the scheme independently audited and verified?
- Would the reduction in emissions happen even if I don't buy the offset?
- What's the price per tonne of carbon saved?
- Are you not-for-profit?
- What other environmental or social benefits does your scheme provide?

The main types of offset

- **Tree planting and forestation schemes** You pay a company to plant trees to soak up ('sequester') carbon from the atmosphere. While trees begin to sequester significant amounts of carbon two to three years after planting, these schemes are often criticised because it takes up to 100 years to reach their maximum carbon capacity, and in some cases there's no guarantee the trees will be around for that long. According to the AGO, Greenhouse Friendly-approved forestry projects are independently verified and have legal arrangements to ensure the forests are permanent.
- **Renewable energy**, available as Accredited GreenPower (see left), non-accredited hydro power (which does less to reduce our carbon emissions in the future) or Gold Standard renewable energy (from overseas renewable energy projects).
- **Energy efficiency schemes** Companies in the ACT and NSW, for example, operating under the NSW Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme, give away free compact fluorescent light bulbs and water-efficient showerheads to consumers. How can they afford to do this? The bulbs and showerheads are paid for by electricity retailers, which are required to offset some of their emissions. They may also be given away by companies, which then sell of the offset credits to consumers and businesses.
- **Australian Greenhouse Friendly accredited projects** The AGO accredits emission reduction projects, including energy efficiency and flaring of methane from landfills — these are offered as offsets by some suppliers. ■

Perils of eating out

Food Safety Week is 12–19 November — but just how much do state governments and councils tell us about hygiene in restaurants and food outlets?

nutshell

► Poor hygiene in restaurants can result in food poisoning. But currently it's almost impossible to find out if a restaurant is up to scratch.

► In some countries food safety inspection details are published on a website and restaurants have to display their hygiene score. CHOICE wants a similar system here.

Live and dead cockroaches, pigeons wandering around the kitchen, ready-to-eat Peking duck stored in garbage bags on the floor, and exposed meat and other food being prepared in the toilet airlock. These stomach-turning observations were reported by food inspectors on visits to three inner Melbourne restaurants throughout last year.

If you knew about this it's unlikely you'd choose to eat in those establishments. But details were only made public after these restaurants were convicted and fined under the Victorian Food Act many months later — in one case, almost a year-and-a-half after the fact.

Contaminated food from restaurants, commercial caterers, bakeries, takeaways and nationally franchised fast-food premises was suspected or confirmed as the culprit responsible for around 65% of reported food poisoning outbreaks in Australia in 2006. So it's certainly in your interest to know the hygiene status of food outlets if you don't want to get sick.

You can try to reduce the risk by avoiding foods that, according to official data, are most often associated with food poisoning outbreaks — frequent offenders include chicken and other meats, egg-based sauces and dishes (including hollandaise sauce, custard and mayonnaise), bean sprouts/alfalfa and rice. But this isn't always practical, and in most cases these foods are perfectly safe.

There's no fast and easy way of knowing if a restaurant has a kitchen that's filthy or is infested with rats, or even if it passed its last council inspection.

5.4 million estimated cases of food-borne illness in Australia each year. If you think you have food poisoning, see a doctor. Doctors and labs are legally obliged to report some infections commonly transmitted by food, including salmonella, campylobacter (except in NSW) and listeria. If you suspect contaminated food from a food outlet is responsible, report it to your local council's environmental health department.



Australians in the dark

Australians are for the most part kept in the dark about dirty restaurants and other food outlets. The overall administration of food safety is on the state level. Restaurant inspections are carried out by local council staff (generally environmental health officers), and a report is completed for each visit detailing the food outlet's hygiene standards — both good and bad.

The frequency of inspections can vary from council to council and state to state and can be up to the discretion of the inspecting officer, but will generally depend on the risk the food business poses and its history of compliance with food standards. Some businesses may be inspected every 18 months, others every six months, for example.

If a business fails to comply with food safety requirements under the Food Standards Code or relevant Act, inspectors have a number of compliance and enforcement options available to them, which can vary from state to state. These include written warnings, improvement notices or — for more serious breaches — on-the-spot fines (penalty or infringement notices, as they're known in some states) right through to prosecution. But inspection reports and details of notices or fines that are issued aren't made public.

Details can be requested from local councils under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, but the process can be painfully slow and the request refused. >

Australians are the most part kept in the dark about dirty restaurants. Inspection reports and penalty notices aren't made public.

< Blacktown and Woollahra councils in NSW this year released details of food businesses that had been issued penalty notices for breaching food safety requirements, in response to an FOI request lodged by newspapers. But the information gained, while enlightening, is historical.

We surveyed the states and territories and asked if the situation was going to change. The NT, Queensland, SA, Tasmania and Victoria said they had no immediate plans to improve public access to this type of information, although some are considering the options. The NT plans to consider the merits of the various food hygiene rating systems (see below). In SA, the Department of Health is examining different models of informing consumers. And an inquiry into food regulation in Victoria has taken place; as part of this the publication of businesses' food and safety records, as an incentive to drive improvement, was examined. The final report hadn't been made public as we went to press.

NSW now has a website (www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/prosecutions.asp) that publishes details of businesses that have been convicted of an offence under the Food Act, and WA is in the process of developing one. Prosecutions are public and convictions are routinely reported in local papers, so the NSW website really only pulls together information that's already available. While this is progress, it only highlights the minority of offenders that are taken to court. In NSW there were 16 prosecutions over the last six months, for example. That's just the tip of the iceberg when you consider that 1000 or so penalty notices are issued in NSW each year, and customers of these establishments are none the wiser.

NSW is currently reviewing a proposal to take its website a step further and 'name and shame' those businesses that are issued penalty notices.

The ACT didn't respond to our survey.

Seeing the light overseas

Overseas, the situation for consumers is frequently far better. In many parts of the world you can check a restaurant's hygiene score in the window, the same way as you would the menu. Some cities even have websites where you can read the latest inspection reports for local restaurants. Here are some examples:

- In New York, the inspection results of more than 20,000 of the city's restaurants are available on a website (www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/rii/index.shtml) and can be searched by name, neighbourhood or hygiene points score (including establishments that have been awarded a 'Golden Apple' for their

Health department not interested

Vicki, 34, became violently ill after eating Hainanese chicken rice from a Chinese restaurant, suffering from diarrhoea, stomach cramps and a fever. Her husband and daughter, who both tasted her meal, had similar symptoms, but to a lesser degree. Her doctor ran tests and she was diagnosed with campylobacter infection.



It took almost two weeks for Vicki to recover, and cost her in excess of \$120 in medicine and medical expenses. While her doctor "was great and very supportive and phoned me at home twice to update me on test results and check on me", she had a different experience with the health department.

Campylobacter being a reportable disease, Vicki expected the state health department to investigate the incident further and contact her for details, but it didn't. Vicki says, "I followed it up myself, and was directed to contact the municipal health department. They were sceptical that I became sick from such a popular restaurant, and although they sent someone out to get details from me, didn't seem interested in taking it up with the restaurant involved. I found this process very disappointing."

We contacted the health department involved and were told that, "Section 54 ('secrecy') of the Food Act 1984 makes it an offence for Council to disclose or publish any information pertaining to this matter." But they told us that under the act it's their duty to follow up all food complaints within 24 hours of the complaint being lodged.

excellent food safety practices). A similar service exists in Los Angeles in the form of www.restaurantwatch.com.

- Toronto's DineSafe program allows customers to see the results of any restaurant's most recent inspection on a coloured sign in the window — green for pass, yellow for conditional pass (infractions must be corrected within 48 hours) and red for those that fail and are closed down. Its website (accessed via <http://app.city.toronto.on.ca/food2/index.jsp>) provides details of each establishment's most recent inspection finding, as well as its inspection history.
- Denmark provides comprehensive details on a website (www.fvst.dk/smiley; it's in Danish), with

In many parts of the world you can check a restaurant's hygiene score in the window, the same way as you would the menu.

summaries displayed at the premises through the use of a range of different 'smiley face' symbols, from happy to sad.

- A 'Scores on the doors' scheme is being trialled in a few local authorities across England. Inspection information is displayed on the door or window, supported by information on a website. See www.food.gov.uk/safereating/hyg/scoresonthedoors.
- In Auckland, registered food premises are given a food hygiene grade from A to E, which they have to display. There's also a website (www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/council/services/foodsearch) where you can search by business name or address and look up the grade.

Do scores on doors make a difference?

Inspection statistics from the LA program show the compulsory display of hygiene grade cards leads to cleaner restaurants. When that program was first implemented in 1998, 57% of restaurants got an 'A' grade. By 2005, that number had grown to 84%. The number of hospitalisations for food-borne illnesses in LA dropped by over 13% in the first year of the program, and the decrease was sustained in subsequent years.

Not only are restaurants cleaner and diners healthier, the cleanest establishments are making more money, according to more research on the LA program. Restaurants that earn an 'A' grade see their revenue grow by nearly 6%, because the public knows they're clean. By contrast, 'B' grade restaurants earn less than 1% more each year, and 'C' grade restaurants lose 1% of business revenue when the grades are published.

You should be able to choose a restaurant on the basis of hygiene, just as you would on the basis of the menu, service or ambience. Ultimately, arming consumers with information about food inspection results — all of them, not just the extremes that result in convictions — raises expectations and gives an incentive to food outlets to improve or maintain good hygiene standards. This has a knock-on effect of reducing the health risk to consumers. ■



HOW TO SPOT A DODGY ESTABLISHMENT

Looking hygienic is no guarantee that a food outlet is. **Restaurants** in particular can be hard to judge, as much of the food handling and preparation is done out of sight, but you can still look for:

- Dirty floors, counters and tables. If people can't keep their premises clean, chances are they don't do much better with the food.
- Staff with dirty hands or fingernails, dangling jewellery and long hair not tied back.
- Dirty or chipped crockery, cutlery or glasses.
- Lukewarm food that should be hot, and cold food that isn't quite cold. Hot foods should be kept above 60°C [steaming hot] and cold foods below 5°C, to stop most bacteria from multiplying.
- Foods not cooked right through, such as a pink centre in hamburger meat and pink uncooked chicken (particularly near the bone).

You can avoid the worst **cafés and takeaway outlets** by keeping a lookout for the following:

- Uncovered or unwrapped food on counters.
- Unrefrigerated prepacked sandwiches.
- Condensation dripping from display cabinets onto food.
- Raw and cooked foods, such as salads and meats, touching each other in display units.
- Staff using the same set of tongs for different types of food — for example, salads and meat.
- Staff not washing hands after handling raw meat.
- Don't automatically think that if staff are wearing gloves everything is OK. If they handle money as well as your food, or if they don't change the gloves when handling different foods, the exercise is pointless.

CHOICE verdict

We should be entitled to know the health record of restaurants and other food outlets. Disclosure of this information provides an incentive for food businesses to improve their hygiene quality, which helps reduce the risk of food-borne illnesses.

CHOICE wants hygiene inspection information to be made available to the public in a nationally consistent manner — both on a central website and displayed on the premises — so people can make an informed decision as to where they eat, no matter where they live. We've written to the food and health authorities in each state and territory calling for action. **You can sign our letter by going to choice.com.au/campaigns.** Until results of inspections are publicly available, use our checklist (above) of what to look for when eating out to help reduce the risk of getting food poisoning.

A taste for Fairtrade



Buying Fairtrade products means your purchasing choices improve the lives of small producers in developing countries.

nutshell

► Fairtrade aims to improve the lives of small producers in developing nations by paying farmers a fair price for their work.

► Fairtrade-labelled products such as coffee, tea and chocolates are available in supermarkets at competitive prices.

The term Fairtrade has been at the edge of consumer consciousness for the last five to 10 years. You may have heard of Fairtrade goods such as coffee and chocolate, but might assume they're still only available from 'alternative' shops and websites. Fairtrade is also often confused with high-priced organic produce. In fact many supermarkets now sell Fairtrade products, and they're not always more expensive than their standard equivalents. So what's Fairtrade all about?

What sets Fairtrade apart is its overriding aim of improving the lives of small producers in developing nations by guaranteeing income security and shortening supply chains. When you buy fairly traded tea or coffee, for example, the financial benefits won't be pocketed only by retail giants or major producers. It's a way to ensure your buying decisions have a direct impact on the lives of small producers in the developing world.

According to non-profit organisation Oxfam, Fairtrade isn't charity. It's about "giving third-world farmers and workers a fair go by paying the producers a fair price for their work". When a product carries a Fairtrade label, it means Fairtrade standards have been met at every stage of production, meaning at least some of the profits go back to the farmers and their communities.

Bitter reality

The coffee trade provides a living for more than 20 million farmers in developing countries. It's one of the most valuable agricultural commodities in world trade.

Sadly, under a free market, many producers have little to no access to price information or direct contact with their buyers. This leaves countless farmers vulnerable to exploitation and world price fluctuations.

A 2002 report from the Fairtrade Foundation found that coffee beans can change hands as many as 150 times before they reach consumers on the shelves. Each time the beans go through a middleman, a proportion of the return is absorbed. For every \$2.50 cup of coffee you buy, the farmer will earn as little as three cents.

When world prices fall, growers lose a large portion of their income, even though there may not be a matching reduction in supermarket prices of coffee.

Fairtrade helps by setting a base price for coffee beans, to ensure disadvantaged farmers still receive a minimum guaranteed price for their work. If the market price goes above the guaranteed minimum, the producer receives the higher of the two, maintaining the incentive for farmers to remain competitive in the quality of their produce.

Child labour and cocoa

The poor conditions faced by producers in the developing world aren't limited to the coffee industry. Every time you bite into a piece of chocolate, chances are you're at the consumption end of child labour.

The Fair Trade Association of Australia and New Zealand (FTAAANZ) reported on its website that 284,000 children in West Africa work in dangerous conditions on cocoa farms, with many subjected to forced labour and exposed to harmful pesticides on a daily basis. Yet each member of a cocoa-farming family may earn as little as US\$30 per year. Under Fairtrade, such exploitative labour conditions aren't allowed.

Growing support

The good news is that Australians have got behind Fairtrade since FTAAANZ was established in 2003. Sales of Fairtrade-labelled products reached \$6.8 million in 2006, with the total tipped to reach over \$10 million by the end of 2007. The number of Fairtrade licensees also grew from six to 70 over the period of three years. Coffee is the major driver behind the growth, accounting for 75% of sales, followed by chocolate, tea and sports balls.

What's fair out there?

Most supermarkets now stock a range of Fairtrade-labelled coffee, tea and chocolate, making it easier to make the switch to socially responsible purchases. Popular Fairtrade coffee brands such as Republica and Scarborough Fair are available in most Coles and Woolworths and some IGA supermarkets. In addition, Coles has its own home-brand Fairtrade labels: Coles Finest Ethiopian and Coles Finest Signature Blend.

The cost isn't over-the-top, either — for example, Coles Finest fairtrade ground coffee is \$4.36/100 g. As for coffee bought from baristas, Sydney's Fair Trade Coffee Company claims its Fairtrade brew is only about three cents a cup dearer — a cost the company absorbs.

Online shops such as Tradewinds Tea & Coffee, Tribes and Nations and the Oxfam Shop offer a comprehensive list of products that are Fairtrade-certified. Instant coffees are sold at around \$5/100 g and chocolates from \$5.50/100 g. The online stores also offer bulk-buy options for workplaces and schools.

Besides coffee, tea and chocolate, garments made from Fairtrade-certified cotton have been available in Australia and New Zealand since mid 2006. You can order Natural Fashion, Hug and Organic Embrace certified organic cotton clothing online from Eco Essentials: www.ecoessentials.com.au/clothes.

For those with kids, Nature Spot in New Zealand sells 100% organic and Fairtrade-certified babywear online.



It guarantees that no harmful chemicals or pesticides are used in the entire growing and manufacturing process: www.naturespot.co.nz.

You also can buy 'Make trade fair' T-shirts from Oxfam shops from \$25 to show your support for Fairtrade.

How else can I help?

There's a lot you can do to support the growing desire to give disadvantaged producers a fair go. One of the ideas suggested by FTAAANZ is to organise Fairtrade communities at work, in schools or in churches. Participants work with FTAAANZ to meet a set of corporate and social goals and to raise awareness of fair trade in a particular community. Some examples would be introducing Fairtrade coffee in your workplace or holding a Fairtrade fete at a church fundraising.

You can also take part in awareness campaigns during Fairtrade fortnight each year in May. ■



Look out for the Fairtrade logo in super-markets and other shops.

! CONTROVERSY

In April 2007, Oxfam Australia was accused by two Melbourne academics of misleading the public by claiming Fairtrade coffee helped alleviate poverty for farmers in the developing world.

The pair lodged a formal complaint with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), referring to alleged reports that Peruvian coffee workers were paid less than the minimum wage required under Fairtrade requirements, and thus didn't qualify to be labelled as Fairtrade. The ACCC dismissed the claim, concluding the allegation relied on evidence which "may be subject to different interpretations".

In response to media coverage at the time, the Chair of FTAAANZ, Diana Gibson, said in a public statement that while breaches of standards are minimal, they're more likely to occur where farmers can only sell part of their crops through the Fairtrade system (often only 10–15%) and are left to rely on the free market to sell the rest.

FTAAANZ executive officer Neil Bowker told CHOICE that the situation has been investigated and rectified since the incident.

When to cheat on your trusted brands



Do supermarkets' premium own-brands taste as good as the brands we know and love?

nutshell

► Among the three supermarkets whose 'premium own-brands' were tested, there was no clear winner. But neither did a known brand name win out every time.

► If your supermarket sells its own-brand products for less than a major brand name, it's well worth trying them — you could save some money and still please the family.

Earlier this year, CHOICE reported on how much you can stretch your food and basics budget by buying some or all of your groceries at an ALDI store (in our supermarket price survey, July 2007). But as you stroll the aisles of ALDI, WOOLIES or COLES, do you wonder whether the growing number of supermarket-owned premium varieties are worth trying, or if they're inherently inferior to 'name' brands?

Till not so long ago, the simply packaged 'home' or 'no name' brands from supermarkets were regarded as inferior by many shoppers, who assumed their cut price reflected lower-grade ingredients. The new supermarket brands, however, are called 'premium own-brands' or sometimes 'private label' brands, and claim they match the leading brands for quality but at slightly lower shelf prices.

By choosing these brands, you can get at least some of your groceries at a lower price, apparently without forsaking quality ingredients. But we know from what you've told us in the past that price isn't everything. The question remains: will your family like, and eat, them?

To put WOOLWORTHS SELECT, YOU'LL LOVE COLES and ALDI's premium own-brands to the test, we asked over 140 CHOICE Home Testers to try a range of supermarket premium own-brand items and compare each with a similar item from a leading brand. Our testers tried products that many people would buy regularly — pasta sauce, peanut butter, canned fruit, baked beans,

biscuits and aluminum foil. We also have information about the quality of products recently tested by CHOICE: cheddar cheese (October 2007) and laundry detergents (April 2007). We looked at how all these supermarket products stacked up against brands most shoppers would easily recognise.

The detailed assessments start on the right — but, in general, we (and our Home Testers) were pleasantly surprised with the results.

Among the three supermarkets whose premium own-brands we tested, there was no clear winner. A number of the supermarkets' products, however, were rated as good as or better than the known brand names in their categories, making it worth considering giving premium own-brands a go.

You might want to include more factors in your buying decisions, though. In August 2007, WOOLWORTHS SELECT found itself under the spotlight for questionable environmental claims on its tissues, and it's since asked the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) to investigate the paper supplier, APP, on its behalf. For some people, an environmental claim may be a critical buying point, as might other aspects not covered by quality and price.

USING THE TABLE

- ↑ Denotes a score significantly higher than that of the brand name tested.
- = Denotes a score that wasn't significantly different from that of the brand name tested.
- ↓ Denotes a score significantly lower than that of the brand name tested.

PRODUCT	BRAND NAME TESTED	ALDI COMPARED TO BRAND NAME	WOOLWORTHS SELECT COMPARED TO BRAND NAME	YOU'LL LOVE COLES COMPARED TO BRAND NAME
Chocolate chip cookies	Arnott's Premier	↓ than brand name	= brand name	↓ than brand name
Pasta sauce — napoletana	Raguiletto	No Aldi product	= brand name	= brand name
Peanut butter — smooth	Kraft	↓ than brand name	↓ than brand name	↓ brand name
Canned peach slices in juice	SPC	↑ than brand name	↑ than brand name	= brand name
Baked beans in tomato sauce	Heinz	= brand name	No Woolworths Select product	= brand name
Aluminium foil	Multix Alfoil	= brand name	= brand name	↓ than brand name

IMPLICATIONS OF SUPERMARKET PREMIUM OWN-BRANDS

For the supermarkets:

- Premium own-brands increase profits — supermarkets can make more on these products than selling other companies' brands.
- They provide retailer identity. Anyone who's been in WOOLWORTHS and seen the sea of silver Select labels will agree — it's difficult to forget which supermarket you're in.
- For ALDI, own-brands form the basis of the strategy for its existence — and profitability. It buys all its products in bulk from manufacturers and packages the vast majority with its own brand names.

For you, the consumer:

- Savings without compromising on quality. That's what the supermarkets claim, and our results suggest that it's true often enough to make buying premium own-brands worthwhile — when they've got everything else you're looking for.
- According to the supermarkets, there are other shopper benefits: the products are easy to identify (you can find the quality and value level you want with ease); and, like the big brands, premium own-brand items are quality-assured (the supermarkets are staking their reputation on them). You might think you can cope without the former and expect the latter anyway.

What are the pitfalls?

Consumers have told CHOICE they're concerned about the impact own-brands could have on the supermarket landscape:

- Limited shelf space could mean fewer choices. CHOICE has monitored the number of brands in several grocery categories over recent times, and we haven't seen a significant reduction in brands. Common sense, however, suggests something's got to give (the aisles can only grow so much to accommodate the new labels) — what gives might be the variety on offer within brands. Shoppers may see more own-brand items on supermarket shelves, but fewer flavours and sizes for other brands.
- Could we end up with fewer Australian-owned and made products? Supermarkets say that, where possible, they source from local producers if they meet their specifications for quality (and quantity) at a given price. The real impact on local producers is difficult to judge, but if more low-priced imports compete for limited shelf space, some Australian-made brands might be priced out of the supermarket.

79% of Australian consumers think supermarket own-brands are a good alternative to other brands. Our results suggest that it's certainly worth considering them when you shop.

The products compared

Chocolate chip biscuits (Price per 100 g)

ALDI Parkwood	85 cents
ARNOTT'S Premier	\$1.17
WOOLWORTHS SELECT	\$1.12
YOU'LL LOVE COLES Ultimate	\$1.00



WOOLWORTHS SELECT were liked just as much as ARNOTT'S Premier biscuits, so they're definitely worth checking out if the price is right. YOU'LL

LOVE COLES were next best liked, followed by the ALDI biscuits. If you find them at a significant saving compared to your usual brand, the premium own-brands all scored at least three out of five for taste, so don't be afraid to experiment.

All the biscuits were 40% chocolate chips except the ALDI Parkwood, with only 27% — which may explain why it was considerably less expensive and the least liked. All the brands were made in Australia and nutritionally they were quite similar.

Pasta sauce (Price per 100 g)

RAGULETTO Napolitana Classic Tomato	40 cents
WOOLWORTHS SELECT Napolitana	43 cents
YOU'LL LOVE COLES Napolitana	56 cents

All three pasta sauces (ALDI doesn't sell a napoletana sauce) were equally well liked, so both supermarket brands are worthy of a trolley trial. Perhaps surprisingly, though, when we bought the products, the brand-name sauce was the cheapest, so you may not make any saving on the own-brands anyway.

If you prefer an authentic Italian sauce and don't mind racking up extra food miles, both YOU'LL LOVE COLES and WOOLWORTHS SELECT were imported from Italy — the RAGULETTO, made in Victoria, had a considerably shorter distance to travel.

Nutritionally speaking, both WOOLWORTHS and RAGULETTO were similar, with YOU'LL LOVE COLES being much higher in salt and having slightly more fat and kilojoules. >



Increased competition for shelf space could mean less variety, and fewer flavours and sizes within brand ranges.

The products compared

All the prices quoted are those we paid in mid 2007, except for laundry detergent costs, which are from our price survey in February 2007.

Peanut butter (Price per 100 g)

ALDI Bramwells Smooth	50 cents
KRAFT Smooth	89 cents
WOOLWORTHS SELECT Smooth	76 cents
YOU'LL LOVE COLES Smooth	72 cents

It seems the nostalgic childhood favourite **KRAFT** is still our preferred peanut butter — none of the supermarket brands scored as well for taste. But jar for jar, there are a few cents to be saved by buying a supermarket's own-brand, so it may be worth trying it out on your own taste buds.

All the peanut butters tested are Australian except **ALDI**'s, which is imported from China. And none stood out nutritionally, though **ALDI** was easily the least salty, and **KRAFT** the saltiest by quite some margin.

Interestingly, both the **KRAFT** and **WOOLWORTHS SELECT** varieties contain antioxidants to help prevent rancidity, while **COLES**' and **ALDI**'s have none, and **COLES** claims

its peanut butter is made with "high-oleic peanuts", which are less prone to going rancid, removing the need to add preservatives.



Canned peaches (Price per 100 g)

ALDI Sweet Valley Slices in Juice	35 cents
SPC Sliced in Natural Juice	41 cents
WOOLWORTHS SELECT Slices in Fruit Juice	35 cents
YOU'LL LOVE COLES Slices in Fruit Juice	25 cents

For peaches, **ALDI** Sweet Valley and **WOOLWORTHS SELECT** shone, both being preferred to the market leader, **SPC**. **YOU'LL LOVE COLES** didn't do badly either — it was liked equally to **SPC**.

Nutritionally, there's little in it — **SPC**, perhaps, has slightly less sugar (9% compared with 11–12%).

YOU'LL LOVE COLES and **WOOLWORTHS SELECT** peaches are imported from South Africa; **SPC** and **ALDI** Sweet Valley are Australian-made.



Baked beans (Price per 100 g)

ALDI Corale in Tomato Sauce	19 cents
HEINZ in Tomato Sauce	26 cents
YOU'LL LOVE COLES in Tomato Sauce	21 cents

Beans means ...? Well, just beans, according to our tasters. None of the brands stood out as significantly better overall. So if the price is right, give any of them a go on your breakfast toast.

Nutritionally they're pretty similar, with the **ALDI** Corale being saltier (400 mg/100 g, compared with about 300 mg/100 g for the others). If you prefer more beans and less sauce, **HEINZ** tops the other two brands, with a minimum of 52% beans compared to their 42%. **WOOLWORTHS SELECT** doesn't have baked beans.

HEINZ products, which feel as Aussie as the Hills Hoist, are actually made across the ditch in New Zealand; **ALDI** Corale is Italian-made; and **YOU'LL LOVE COLES** is Australian.



Aluminium foil (Price per metre)

ALDI Goliath Extra Strength	11 cents
MULTIX Alfoil	18 cents
WOOLWORTHS SELECT Heavy Duty	18 cents
YOU'LL LOVE COLES	13 cents

It's not just about the strength of the foil — the ease with which you can open the pack and how well it tears off the roll are also important. These aspects let the **WOOLWORTHS SELECT** foil down somewhat, but both **WOOLWORTHS SELECT** and **ALDI** Goliath foils were considered comparable overall with **MULTIX** Alfoil.

So **ALDI** Goliath is well worth trying at just 11 cents per metre (though it only came in a 30 m pack, while the others could be purchased as a 10 m roll). All the foils are made in China.



Laundry detergent (Price per wash; score)

ALDI Trimat Advanced Stain Removing Formula	27 cents; 78%
OMO High Performance Now with Staizyme	58 cents; 78%
YOU'LL LOVE COLES Cold Active Triple Enzyme	42 cents; 77%
WOOLWORTHS SELECT Advance Performance	37 cents; 68%

In the most recent CHOICE laundry detergents test (April 2007), ALDI Trimat Advanced Stain Removing Formula and YOU'LL LOVE COLES Cold Active Triple Enzyme both performed as well as OMO High Performance in a top loader. In fact, these three detergents were among the best tested. Over time, the ALDI Trimat, in particular, would save you a considerable amount of money.

For front loaders and in the 'sensitive' laundry detergent bracket, the top-of-the-range own-brands were comparable to the market leader too — and usually at a considerable saving.

**Cheddar cheese** (Price per 100 g)

ALDI Westacre Vintage	94 cents
MAINLAND Vintage	\$1.56
WOOLWORTHS SELECT Vintage	\$1.44
YOU'LL LOVE COLES Vintage	\$1.20

In October 2007, CHOICE put vintage cheddars in front of five expert Australian cheese tasters. All three supermarket premium brands scored well — comparably to the market leader MAINLAND Vintage. The tasting results showed conclusively that the days when mass-produced cheddar was automatically bland and rubbery are fortunately past, and you can now buy good vintage cheddar in supermarkets.

All the supermarket-brand vintage cheeses listed above are made in Australia; MAINLAND is from New Zealand. Only the WOOLWORTHS SELECT cheddar is made using non-animal rennet, and so is suitable for vegetarians. Overall, if the price is right, they're all worth giving a go. ■



A number of the own-brand products were rated as good as or even better than known brand names in their categories.

HOW WE TESTED

We sent 143 Home Testers a range of different products to try. Each type of product — baked beans or canned peaches, for example — was tried by around 70 different people. Where possible we disguised the brands so they didn't know which ones were on test but some, such as the aluminium foil, had to be left in their original packaging in order for the trial to be valid (trialists needed to use the serrated edge of the box to tear the foil).

The trialists tried and rated a leading brand plus whichever of the supermarket premium own-brands were available for that product. For WOOLWORTHS, we used the WOOLWORTHS SELECT brand; for COLES, the YOU'LL LOVE COLES brand; and for ALDI, the comparable ALDI product (we chose the more expensive premium brand where ALDI had two of its own products on offer).



PHOTOGRAPHY: KENNE BROSS

CHOICE verdict

When doing your weekly shopping, check the price of supermarket premium own-brands such as WOOLWORTHS SELECT and YOU'LL LOVE COLES. If they offer the products you're looking for, give them a go — you might be pleasantly surprised.

ALDI's only an option if you live in the eastern states, but you could save as much as 50% on your groceries there, and chances are you'll generally be happy with the taste or performance.



Super snags?

Our expert tasters gave some of the 'gourmet' sausages from supermarkets high scores, but others were rated no better than cheaper standard snags.

nutshell

► 'Gourmet' on the label doesn't necessarily mean you're buying better sausages. CHOICE's expert tasters gave the highest score to some standard pork sausages. ► Independent butchers often make their own sausages, so they're all different. It's worth trying what's on offer in your area.

The humble snag has gone up in the world. Unless you live out the back of Wheelyabarraback, your local butcher now has a range of gourmet sausages with exotic flavours, and increasingly the big supermarket chains have them too. But are these fancy (and more expensive) sausages really any better than standard snags? To find out we roped in some sausage experts and put 24 types of sausage to the test.

Where are the best sausages?

CHOICE's taste test included most of the gourmet sausages sold nationally by Coles and Woolworths under their own brand names, plus some of their cheaper types and flavours for direct comparison. We also included sausages from two independent butchers for comparison. They didn't top the taste scores, but butchers often have their own recipes and it's still worth trying your local butcher's sausages.

Both supermarket chains also sell local brands in some states, such as PEPPERCORN in Woolworths stores in Sydney and BRITISH SAUSAGE in Coles stores in Perth, but we didn't include them because they're not available elsewhere.

On average, the experts didn't rate the supermarket gourmet sausages significantly better than the standard snags — gourmet sausages appear across the whole range of scores. What's more, the sausages that achieved the highest score are a standard brand — YOU'LL LOVE COLES Pork. Their score of 89% makes them stand out from the pack, and the tasters described them as juicy and tender, with an appealing pork flavour — plus they contain less fat than most of the sausages in this test, and are among the cheapest.

Fat and salt

We all know sausages are fatty. A piece of grilled or barbecued steak with the fat trimmed off is about 8% fat, compared with 22% for some sausages. Sausages need a reasonable amount of fat to make them 'juicy', but some contain a lot less than others and still rated well in our taste test — three of the sausages in the *What to buy* list have well under 20% fat, for example.

Sausages also vary in salt content. Salt plays two important roles in a sausage: it helps prevent the growth of bacteria (see *Gut wrenching*, right), and by dissolving some of the muscle protein, it helps to bind the pieces of meat together. So perhaps it's not surprising that the sausages with the least fat and salt, YOU'LL LOVE COLES Beef Reduced Fat and Salt, weren't rated very highly by the experts. But WOOLWORTHS Aussie Beef Sausages Heart Smart, which have compromised with a little more fat and salt, scored in the middle of the range for overall quality.

Gourmet sausages aren't any 'healthier' than standard ones: there are no significant differences between their kilojoule, total fat and sodium levels.

What goes into a sausage?

Traditionally sausages were a way of using the bits of animals that are edible but not appealing to some people — such as lungs, liver, blood and fat. In Australia now, though, sausages must be made from muscle meat.

Under the Food Standards Code the definition of 'meat' for sausages is quite strict. A sausage must contain at least 50% fat-free muscle meat, and the fat

What to buy

\$9.90/kg • COLES FINEST
Tuscan-style

COLES FINEST
French Toulouse-style
• \$9.90/kg

WOOLWORTHS
Lamb Rosemary & Garlic Gourmet
• \$9.90/kg

WOOLWORTHS
Beef and Cracked Pepper Gourmet
• \$9.90/kg

WOOLWORTHS
Spicy Pork Continental Gourmet
• \$9.90/kg

YOU'LL LOVE COLES Pork
• \$6.25/kg

BEST BUY

must be no more than 50% of the fat-free meat. (In other words, a sausage containing 75% meat can be 50% fat-free meat and 25% fat.) All the supermarket sausages met these standards.

As well as meat, most sausages also contain sausage mix, water and the flavourings that make them 'rosemary and garlic' or 'leek, thyme and mint', and so on. Sausage mix is a starch-based filler (traditionally flour and salt) that helps to hold the sausage together. Several of the sausages we tested are gluten-free and the starch comes from rice, potato, tapioca or maize instead of wheat flour. Other ingredients you'll often see listed are:

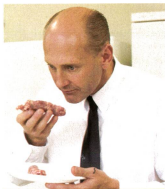
- **Soy protein isolate** Like flour, this helps to hold in the fat and water.
- **Mineral salts** (450, 451, 452) Phosphates that combine with meat protein and help it hold water.
- **Sodium metabisulphite** (223) Added as a preservative.

Are they what they say?

CHOICE had the sausages tested to see if they contain the type of meat they say they do. Most brands' labels were accurate, but a few contain other meats as well. COLES FINEST Chorizo simply says on the label that they're 'meat' — our lab found beef and pork. >

Meet the experts

We greatly appreciate the skill and dedication of our three panellists (two technical experts and a consumer judge) who chewed their way through 24 types of sausage.



Wayne McGee

Wayne is Head Teacher, Meat Programs, at the Hunter College of TAFE. He's an experienced judge of meat and sausages.



Keith Ireland

Keith is Head Teacher of Butchery at Granville College of TAFE. He's a regular sausage judge for the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW.



Fiona Mair

Fiona is CHOICE's home economist. She's a food expert with extensive experience in judging cooking results in CHOICE's appliance tests.



GUT WRENCHING

Germs from raw meat can give you a serious dose of food poisoning. When you're cooking steak and chops, most germs are on the outside and are killed by the heat of the barbecue or grill, but bacteria are all the way through minced-meat products such as sausages and burgers.

Check sausages are fully cooked by cutting into the middle — it should be piping-hot, with no pink meat left. But also don't burn sausages or other meat. Burning meat can form harmful chemicals — it's safer to cook it at a lower temperature for a longer time.

PRODUCT	RATINGS	MEAT		NUTRIENTS PER 100 g			BUYING		
	Overall score (%)	Meat content (%)	Type of meat	Energy (kJ)	Total fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Sold as 'gourmet'	Gluten-free	Price per kg (\$)
Brand (in rank order)									
You'll Love Coles Pork	89	76	Pork	803	13.9	738		✓	6.25
Coles Finest French Toulouse-style	82	76	Pork / lamb	868	16.3	670	✓	✓	9.90
Independent butcher A Italian Style Pork	81	ns	Pork	ns	ns	ns	✓	ns	15.00
Coles Finest Tuscan-style	80	76	Pork	887	16.8	685	✓	✓	9.90
Woolworths Beef and Cracked Pepper Gourmet	80	80	Beef	1023	20.3	872	✓		9.90
Woolworths Lamb Rosemary & Garlic Gourmet	79	80	Lamb	1008	20.2	650	✓		9.90
Woolworths Spicy Pork Continental Gourmet	79	80	Pork	1053	21.5	660	✓		9.90
Coles Finest Chorizo	77	76	Beef / pork	826	14.5	580	✓	✓	9.90
Woolworths Old English Style Pork Sausages	76	70	Pork / beef	1107	22.3	621			5.30
You'll Love Coles Italian Style Pork	74	79	Pork	942	18.3	2157		✓	7.15
Coles Finest Beef & Cracked Pepper	72	75	Beef	1079	21.9	650	✓	✓	9.90
Woolworths Aussie Beef Sausages Heart Smart	72	65	Beef	697	9.9	404			6.00
Coles Finest Lamb, Leek, Thyme & Mint	71	76	Lamb	842	13.6	580	✓	✓	9.90
Woolworths Spicy Lamb North African Gourmet	70	80	Lamb	1016	20.4	613	✓		9.90
Woolworths Pork Traditional Italian Gourmet	69	80	Pork	1060	21.6	578	✓		10.55
Woolworths Beef Sausages Thin	68	72	Beef	1080	21.7	760			5.30
You'll Love Coles Thin Beef	68	76	Beef	882	16.4	596		✓	6.25
Independent butcher A Plain Beef	67	ns	Beef	ns	ns	ns	✓	ns	10.00
Woolworths Pork Sausages	64	70	Pork / beef	1106	22.2	624			5.30
Woolworths Lean Beef Gourmet	64	80	Beef	678	10.0	611	✓		9.90
You'll Love Coles Beef Reduced Fat and Salt	63	74	Beef	574	5.6	229		✓	6.60
Woolworths Beef Red Wine Gourmet	61	80	Beef	1014	20.1	678	✓		9.90
Independent butcher B Lamb & Rosemary	60	ns	Lamb	ns	ns	ns	✓	ns	8.75
Independent butcher B Beef & Red Wine	55	ns	Beef	ns	ns	ns	✓	ns	8.75

HOW WE TESTED

The tasters didn't know which sausages they were tasting, only the flavour and style (such as 'lamb and rosemary' or 'Tuscan-style'). A professional chef cooked them on a gas barbecue and each taster had two cooked and one raw (on a separate plate) for comparison. They scored the sausages out of 100, based on the criteria used in the Deli Meat Competition of the Sydney Royal Fine Food Show (run by the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW):

- Visual appearance raw (out of 10).
- Visual appearance cooked (out of 10).
- Texture (out of 20).
- Workmanship (out of 20).
- Flavour (out of 20).
- Aroma (out of 20).

None of the sausages would have won a Gold Award (90 or more points) but the top two would be Silver (82–89) and a further eight Bronze (74–81).

USING THE TABLE

Brand Independent butchers have their own recipes and their sausages are all different, so we haven't named the two in the test — they're just representative examples.

Meat content This is the percentage of meat stated on the label — it includes fat, not just the lean meat.

Type of meat For more on this, see page 27.

Energy, total fat, sodium These are figures stated on the labels.

Gluten-free Stated to be 'gluten-free' by the manufacturer on the label.

Prices are based on what we paid in Sydney in August 2007.

TABLE NOTES

ns Not stated



Xmas ease

If you can't cope with Christmas crowds, you now have the option of buying your presents online. But do cyberbargains exist, or is traditional high-street shopping cheaper?

nutshell

► Buying online isn't always cheaper than buying in-store, but substantial savings can be made if you're a savvy shopper.
► You can have a gift wrapped and delivered at the click of a button.

Traditionalists may feel online shopping takes the fun out of personally selecting gifts for loved ones, but when you're battling against fellow Christmas shoppers for the last Harry Potter box set on the shelf, it starts to seem like a very attractive option.

You can also arrange for your parcel to be wrapped and delivered with the click of a mouse button, which is particularly useful during the mad rush of the silly season — but will shopping online save you money? CHOICE looked the cost of 10 popular Christmas presents, both in-store and online, to see where the better deal can be found.

Even though you can't think 'online shopping' without eBay springing to mind, it's an auction site and not covered by the same rules as retail stores, so we didn't include it in our price comparison. However, there are sections of eBay called 'eBay Stores' where vendors offer goods for immediate sale at a fixed price. The ACCC says these are retail stores and so normal protections will apply. However, some are located overseas and enforcing your rights may be difficult.

Our price comparison revealed that for some items you can make major savings by buying online: for example, an average saving of around \$69 for the CANON digital camera and \$40 for the SCANPAN Classic frying pan. And just as you shop around when hunting for a bargain in the old-fashioned way, if you're shopping online it's worth looking around for the best price. CLARINS Extra Firming Day Cream, which retails in store for \$105, was on netstore.com.au for \$75.95, and the

SCANPAN, which retails for an average price of \$166.23, was found at www.everten.com.au for just \$111.85.

For other items, though, you'll pay around the same price online as in a store — and for some you'll pay more.

When an item was more expensive online, this was often due to the added cost of delivery. This seems to be particularly the case for books and DVDs, which retail online for around the same price as in-store — plus delivery. Delivery can add a substantial amount to your purchase, so always read the fine print. Some online

Our findings \$

Product	Average online (\$)	Average store (\$)
SONY PSP PlayStation portable	291.39	281.65
MICROSOFT VX-6000 LifeCam	131.37	149.30
CANON Powershot A710 IS	422.77	492.00
TRIVIAL PURSUIT Genus VI	87.64	77.82
NEW RELEASE DVD: Pan's Labyrinth	36.07	33.61
SCANPAN Classic Fry Pan (32 cm)	125.93	166.23
CLARINS Extra Firming Day Cream — Dry Skin 50 mL	97.18	105.00
MOËT & CHANDON Brut Impérial Non Vintage 750 mL	94.30	81.39
SIMPLE ESSENTIALS: CHICKEN by Donna Hay	30.60	24.16
IPOD Nano 4GB	279.95	281.50

All prices correct as of July/August 2007.
Online price includes delivery to Sydney.

Delivery costs can add a substantial amount to your online purchase, so always read the fine print.

Positive online experience

When Ria's new necklace didn't arrive in her postbox, the online store she'd bought it from sent her another — no questions asked.

"I buy stuff online at least once a month, sometimes more," says Ria. "I've bought holidays, jewellery, clothes, shoes and music — but mostly stuff that I can't get in shops, like books from overseas."

"I bought a necklace online from Iggy & Lou Lou, a boutique jewellery store in Melbourne, and after about four weeks, it still hadn't shown up."

"I rang the store and asked when it was going to arrive and they said it'd been posted and had gone through my local collection centre. When I told them I hadn't received it they apologised and said this had never happened before. They sent me another one straightaway, which was really nice — they didn't have to do it."

"Four months later, the original necklace arrived in my postbox. I sent it back, as they'd been good enough to take my word that the original went missing."

"Other experiences I've had haven't been as positive. I've ordered things from eBay that have gone missing and I've never heard anything of them again."



stores charge a flat fee within a region; others have varying costs depending on the number and type of goods, the distance to be sent and whether you choose standard or express post. Default options may not suit you in terms of speed of delivery, and alternatives could cost a lot of money.

The bottom line is this: pricewise, online isn't always going to be cheaper. It all comes down to whether you're the methodical type who'd prefer to sit down with a list in November and get it all done and dusted so you can plan your holiday, or if you rather enjoy being part of the merry throng of Christmas shoppers.

Shopping online safely

A CHOICE Online poll asked readers about their online shopping habits and found that 67% of respondents had never had a bad experience, which is encouraging news. But for those who had, the most common complaints were that the package never showed up (39%) and the product was damaged (22%).

To minimise the potential for ending up out of pocket, look for the following when purchasing from an Australian online store. They won't all apply if you buy from an online store based overseas; it will be governed by its country's consumer laws (if they exist), which may not offer the same protection as those in Australia.

- **An Australian Business Number (ABN)** It's often displayed with the company address.
- **Contact details**, including a contact phone number for customers, email address, street address (not a post office box) and mailing address.
- **A privacy policy** You inevitably provide personal information when you conduct a transaction online. Some companies treat this information as their property and sell it to others, who send you advertising or include you in data on buying preferences.

- **A returns policy** If the product's faulty or not as described, you'll want to know how the store intends to deal with it. Australian-based stores have to comply with the Trade Practices Act, but they may also have provisions for situations the law doesn't cover, or details on how they would prefer to be contacted to ensure you get the best service. Be aware that you may have to pay for postage when returning goods, even within Australia.
- **Product descriptions** should be detailed enough for you to identify what you want. In some countries a product such as a book may have a different title or cover, but otherwise be the same as is available here.
- **Stock availability** is important online. You can't see what's on the shelf and you need some indication of how long it'll normally take to receive your purchase. It's good practice for stores to send you an email when the goods have been dispatched.
- **Payment options** should be clearly displayed. Most sites take credit cards, with some accepting non-internet payment (such as EFT), debit card or cash on delivery. Some overseas sites don't accept Australian credit cards but may offer alternatives, such as intermediary payment systems (for example, PayPal).
- **Confirmation** Online stores should confirm the product details, price, delivery costs and any tax payable, before you finalise the payment. Once you've paid, you should receive a receipt onscreen or by email — or both, if a site is well organised. The receipt should contain all the details on the order confirmation plus the vendor's details.
- **Keep records** of your transaction. Print copies of everything in case something's not what you expected. It's also a good idea to keep a printout of the terms and conditions at the time of purchase for future reference. ■



YOUR COMPREHENSIVE CAR INSURANCE BUYING GUIDE

nutshell

► You can make big savings by shopping around. We found average differences of up to \$2230 for a young driver, \$315 for an adult driver and \$340 for an older driver.

► CHOICE surveyed 24 comprehensive car insurance policies for features, premiums and customer satisfaction. The table, page 34, gives our recommendations and policy details.

In the 12 months to March 2007, about 13% of comprehensively insured cars had an accident, with an average damage cost of around \$2500, according to Insurance Statistics Australia. And more than one in 300 cars was stolen, with an average claim of about \$6500.

CHOICE rated the features of 24 policies for comprehensive car insurance, and found 16 that achieved a high enough score to be recommended. Then we priced all the policies' premiums for three scenarios: a young driver, an adult driver and an older driver. We also asked CHOICE subscribers to rate their satisfaction with their car insurance companies, and added that information to the mix. The table, page 34, lists the best policies. Check their features, satisfaction rating and state-by-state pricing information to find the most suitable ones for you, then get at least three quotes.

For more on how to buy car insurance and save, see our *Buying guide*, page 33.

Does your insurer stack up?

The vast majority of the 2750+ CHOICE members who told us about their insurance companies were satisfied in general; nearly half were 'very satisfied'. The following three companies received the best ratings from their customers:

- AUSTRALIAN PENSIONERS (APIA), with 76% of respondents 'very satisfied'.
- RAA with 60%.
- AAMI with 55%.

The wooden spoon goes to ALLIANZ, with only 30% of respondents for that company very satisfied. Results for the other companies are in the table.

Respondents who weren't satisfied with their insurer named high premiums as the most common reason.

We also asked specifically about satisfaction with claims, and the good news is that car insurers seem to handle claims well: respondents who had made a claim within the last five years were significantly more satisfied than those who hadn't. In fact, overall 70% of them were 'very satisfied' with the way their claim was handled, and the best rating of 92% again went to APIA.

Protect your car from theft

Almost every five minutes a car is stolen somewhere in Australia — check the map, page 32, to find out if your suburb is a theft hotspot.

Stolen cars are often just taken for a joyride, vandalised and dumped. Older cars are especially at risk: they may get stripped for spare parts and never be seen again. Vehicles manufactured between 1988 and 1990 are especially popular theft targets. The cars most at risk are:

- Holden Commodore VT, VX, VY, VZ.
- Ford Falcon AU, BA.
- Toyota Corolla ZZE122R.
- Hyundai Excel X3.
- Mitsubishi Lancer CE.
- Mazda 3 BK.

The best way to protect your car from theft is to install an engine immobiliser. If you have a newer car it probably already has one, as since July 2001 all new passenger cars have been sold with an engine immobiliser to comply with the Australian Design Rules. You can get one installed for less than \$200 through an initiative by the Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council. To get a list of installers, go to www.carsafe.com.au and click on 'Immobilise Now', or phone 1300 668 410. >

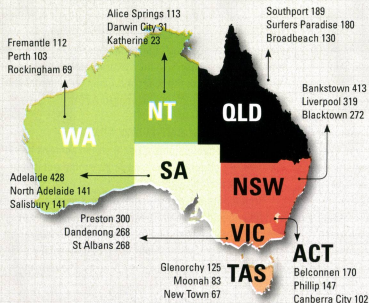
< Young drivers at risk

Late last year in northern NSW four teenagers died in a car crash; only the P-plate driver, aged 17, survived.

The likelihood of a young driver being killed or in a serious accident is very high compared with other age groups: in 2006, 226 drivers aged 17–25 were killed on the roads, representing about 30% of all drivers killed. The population aged 17–25 accounts for only about 16% of Australians old enough to drive. In particular, novice drivers are three times more likely to be involved in a serious crash than drivers with a few years' experience. Reasons include inexperience, overconfidence, risk-taking, alcohol, drugs and less developed visual and perceptual skills. This may lead to young drivers being unable to handle a dangerous road situation.

Theft hotspots

(Number of cars stolen)



SOURCE: THE NATIONAL MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT REDUCTION COUNCIL, 12 MONTHS TO JUNE 2007.

Distraction by passengers is also seen as a risk factor: in Queensland alone in 2001–2005, there were 120 fatal crashes involving drivers under 25 who had three or more passengers in a vehicle, resulting in 165 deaths. This prompted state governments to introduce restrictions: in Queensland and NSW from 1 July this year, P1 provisional licence holders under 25 can carry only one passenger under 21 between the hours of 11 pm and 5 am.

A number of states also have restrictions on P-plate drivers for:

- Alcohol.
- High-performance vehicles.
- Mobile phone use for both driver and passengers, even with a hands-free kit.
- Speed.

Another approach to tackling the problem is driver education. For example, from 1 July, learner drivers in NSW and Victoria need to complete at least 120 hours of supervised driving, including night driving, before they can apply for a P1 licence.

If you're supervising a learner driver:

- Start with frequent short practice sessions in non-threatening situations, such as quiet suburban streets or a deserted parking lot.
- Consider some professional driver training.
- Act as an extra pair of eyes and point out hazards.
- Once the learner driver gets more experienced, give them plenty of time to drive in a variety of weather and road conditions, such as busier times of the day, night driving and driving in wet conditions.

For more information check with your local council, insurer and traffic or road safety authority for factsheets and information sessions. ■

Dogs flown home

When Maureen and Frank visited their daughter and son-in-law in Mount Isa, Queensland, a few years ago, Frank had a not-at-fault accident.

"The car was badly damaged and so impossible to drive home to Canberra," says Maureen. As they had their two dogs, Isaac and Jessie, with them, they couldn't travel back by bus.

"No hire car company could help us because of the distance from Mount Isa to Canberra and the logistics entailed in returning the hire car to Mount Isa. We contacted AAMI and they arranged to fly me, my husband and the two dogs home at no cost to us," says Maureen.

"AAMI also had the car transported to Canberra. All of this was completed with minimal fuss and delay and to a very high standard. We were kept notified of all progress concerning the vehicle's repairs."



BUYING GUIDE

Comprehensive car insurance covers accidents, theft, natural events (such as flood or hail), malicious damage and vandalism. It's the best but also the most expensive cover available. It even covers your car if an accident was your fault.

If your car isn't worth much, you could consider cheaper third-party insurance instead, which covers you for damage you cause to another car, and may include cover for theft and limited cover for damage caused to your car by an uninsured driver.

For comprehensive car insurance there are two ways to specify the amount you'll receive if your car's written off: market value or agreed value.

- With **market value**, the car's value decreases in line with the value or condition of the car. Its value is determined by the insurer at the time of a claim.
- With an **agreed-value** policy, you and the insurer agree on a value of the car that's fixed until the next renewal.

Trap Even with an agreed-value policy, rust, significant deterioration and lack of maintenance could see the insurer reassess the value of your car at the time of a claim, and you may get less than you expected.

WHAT'S COVERED?

Some of the most important cover features are:

- **Car hire for a set number of days or amount:** Policies usually cover car hire, some for up to 21 days, if yours is stolen. Some companies also offer car hire after an accident at extra cost, while others offer a discount on rental rates.
- **Windscreen damage** Some companies cover replacement or repair of a windscreen for no excess, or a reduced one.
- **Personal property** If your personal property in the car is damaged during an accident, most companies include some cover for its replacement. However, not all provide for this in the case of theft: cover is usually limited to a set amount up to \$500, and you may not be covered for all items. Cash is rarely covered.
- **New car** If your new car is written off, you're usually covered for a replacement vehicle. All policies we looked at give you a new car during the first 12 months; some cover 24 to 36 months, but they usually set a kilometre limit.

Trap Your car can lose its cover if it's deemed unroadworthy, or if the driver is unlicensed or driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. This can include medication, such as for anxiety attacks.

HOW TO SAVE ON YOUR PREMIUM

It definitely pays to shop around — we found average differences of up to \$2230 for a young driver, \$315 for an adult driver and \$340 for an older driver.

Another way to save is to **negotiate**. Get a number of quotes and ask your preferred insurer to match the lowest one. Online quotes are a quick and convenient way to do this and you may even be able to benefit from online discounts.

For example, John from Highton in Victoria received a \$330 renewal notice from his insurer, similar to the previous year's. He then got an online quote of \$254 from his insurer's website. "I rang them to ask why they were asking me for 30% more than their online quote. They couldn't explain that, but then said they could reduce the original premium in the renewal notice by \$100. The policy and all other details were identical," says John.

There are a few other ways to reduce the premium:

- No-claim bonus.
- Higher excess.
- Restricted drivers.
- Discounts.

A **no-claim bonus (NCB)** can save you up to 70% on the premium. You usually need to be insured and not make any claims for five to six years to be entitled to the maximum NCB. Things to check:

- How many steps back do you take after an at-fault claim? It may set you back between one and three years, depending on the company.
- What happens if a claim wasn't your fault? If it's an accident and you can identify the driver, you usually won't lose your NCB and also won't have to pay the excess.
- Some companies also don't decrease your NCB for other not-at-fault claims, such as for collision with an animal, hail or storm damage or after theft (where you have an approved alarm).
- Is your NCB protected? If it is, you won't lose it even if you make an at-fault claim. Most insurers only allow you to protect your NCB if you're on the highest level; even then you may have to pay for it and you may be allowed only one claim before it's reduced, whereas some other policies allow an unlimited number of claims.

Trap Even with a protected NCB, if you make a claim BUDGET DIRECT, COTA, NRMA, RACV, SGIC and SGIO will still increase your premium at the next renewal, as they deem you a higher risk.

Excess The excess is a fixed dollar amount that you'll pay on most claims. Most companies allow you to lower or remove the excess for a higher premium, or increase it to reduce the premium.

Restricted drivers Some companies give you a discount on the premium if you nominate certain drivers only or restrict the use of your car to drivers over a certain age (for example, 25).

Trap Review this option regularly and never let an excluded person drive. If there's an accident, you'll pay a high additional excess or may not be covered at all.

Discounts can include:

- **Multi-policy** If you have more than one policy with the same company.
- **Loyalty** For long-term customers.
- **Security** For an approved immobiliser, GPS tracking device or alarm.
- **Pensioner** discounts.
- Discounts for **young drivers** who've completed a skilled driver's course.
- **Annual payment**, rather than by the month.
- For buying the insurance **online**.

70% of people who told CHOICE they'd made a claim were 'very satisfied' with the way their insurance company had handled it.

PRODUCT		POLICY SCORE	SATISFACTION SCORE		STATES WITH A COMPETITIVELY PRICED PREMIUM		
Policy (in order of policy score)	States / areas available	Policy score (%)	General satisfaction score (% very satisfied)	Claims satisfaction score (% very satisfied)	Young driver	Adult driver	Older driver
RECOMMENDED POLICIES							
RAA	SA, Broken Hill	89	60	na		SA	SA
RACT	Tas	86	na	na			
HBA	ACT, NSW, Qld, Tas, Vic	83	na	na		ACT, NSW	ACT, NSW
Mutual Community	NT, SA	83	na	na			
Suncorp Metway	Qld	82	44	75			
CGU	All	81	39	66			
NRMA	ACT, NSW	80	38	60	ACT, NSW	NSW	NSW
RACV	Vic	80	43	69	Vic		
GIO	ACT, NSW, NT, Vic, WA	78	38	69			ACT, NSW, NT, Vic, WA
NRMA	Qld, Tas	77	38	60	Qld, Tas	Tas	Tas
SGIC	SA	77	na	na	SA		
SGIO	WA	77	na	na	WA	WA	WA
Allianz	All	76	30	62	All states but NSW	All states but NSW	All states but NSW
TIO	NT	75	na	na	NT	NT	NT
Ansvar Insurance	All	73	na	na	Qld	Qld, Tas, Vic	Qld, Tas
COTA (A)	All	70	na	na			ACT, NSW, NT, Qld, Tas
OTHER POLICIES							
HBF	WA	67	na	na		WA	
RAC	WA	67	44	70	WA	WA	WA
Australian Pensioners (A)	All	65	76	92			ACT, NSW, WA
Western QBE	SA, WA	63	37	64			
Western QBE	ACT, NSW, Qld, Tas, Vic	62	37	64		ACT, Qld, Tas, Vic	ACT, Qld, Tas, Vic
AAMI	NT, Qld, SA, Tas, Vic, WA	60	55	77	NT, Qld, SA, Vic, WA	NT, Qld, SA, Vic	NT, SA, Vic
AAMI	ACT, NSW	59	55	77	ACT, NSW	ACT, NSW	ACT, NSW
Budget Direct	All but NT	46	44	na	All states but NT	All states but NT	All states but NT

USING THE TABLE

Policy score This is based on an evaluation of the policy's features. In particular we took into account features that CHOICE readers had told us were important to them (many of the ones listed in the table), as well as general cover, convenience and traps.

Satisfaction scores These are based on a survey filled in by 2776 CHOICE members in July this year; 'na' (not applicable) means there weren't enough respondents to report on claims satisfaction. We've reported on general satisfaction for companies with 50 or more respondents; claims satisfaction is reported on for companies with 30 or more respondents with a settled claim in the last five years.

• **General satisfaction** is the percentage of respondents for the company who were 'very satisfied' with their insurer in general.

• **Claims satisfaction** is the percentage of respondents for the company who were 'very satisfied' with the way their claim was handled.

States with a competitively priced premium is an analysis of premiums collected from the companies in June 2007 for three scenarios:

- 'Young driver': Male driver aged 20, nil NCB discount, driving a 2003 Hyundai Accent.
- 'Adult driver': Couple/single person aged 38, max. NCB discount, driving a 2006 Toyota Corolla.

• 'Older driver': Couple/single person aged 60, max. NCB discount, driving a 2006 Toyota Corolla.

Premiums were collected for two suburbs with different demographics in each state. The company is recommended for a scenario in a state when its average quote was lower than the average quote across all companies in this state for the scenario.

Quotes vary depending on a range of factors, including make and model of your car, age, sex and driving history of all regular drivers, and location. So while our analysis of premiums may not exactly match your circumstances, use it as a starting point for shopping around.

FEATURES											CONTACT		
		Free rental car after theft (days or \$)	14 days' rental car after accident	\$0 excess for windscreen	Personal property covered if car is stolen (\$)*	Free car if new car is written off, up to how many months old?	Free repair service (insurer handles claim)	Choice of repairer	Steps back to previous NCB after a claim**	Free NCB protection after 12 months**	24-hour helpline	Phone	Website (all www.)
B)	21	Opt.	✓		200	24	✓	Up to 2	✓	✓	1300 884 567		raa.net
greed	14	Opt.	Opt.		500	24	✓	✓	2	✓	✓	13 27 22	ract.com.au
ther	14		✓		500	Up to 36 (G)		✓	2	✓	✓	13 12 43	hba.com.au
ther	14		✓		500	Up to 36 (G)		✓	2	✓	✓	13 12 43	mutualcommunity.com.au
ther	14	Opt.	Opt.		500	24	✓		1	After 3 years	✓	13 11 55	suncorp.com.au
ther	14		Opt.		500	Up to 36 (G)	✓	✓	1	After 3 years	✓	13 15 32	cgu.com.au
ther	21	Opt.	Opt.			24	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	132 132	nrma.com.au
ther	21	Opt.	Opt.			24	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	13 72 28	racv.com.au
gr. (C)	14	Opt.	Opt.		500	24	✓		2	After 3 years	✓	13 10 10	gio.com.au
ther	21	Opt.	Opt.			24	✓	Opt.	1	✓	✓	132 132	nrma.com.au
ther	21	Opt.	Opt.			24	✓	Opt.	1	✓	✓	133 233	sgic.com.au
ther	21	Opt.	Opt.			24	✓	Opt.	1	✓	✓	133 233	sgio.com.au
ther	14	Opt.	Opt.		500	24	✓	✓	2	✓	✓	13 10 00	allianz.com.au
Market	Up to \$1000		✓		300	12	Darwin	✓	1	✓	✓	1300 301 833	tiofi.com.au
Market	14		\$100 excess		500	12	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	1300 650 540	ansvar.com.au
ther	14	Opt.	Opt.		500	24	✓	✓	2	After 4 years	✓	1300 130 050	cota.com.au
greed	Up to \$250	(D)	(F)		500	12		✓	Up to 3	✓	✓	13 34 23	hbf.com.au
greed	14	Opt.	(F)			12	✓	✓	2	✓	✓	13 17 03	rac.com.au
ther	21				500	12	✓		1	After 3 years	✓	13 25 55	apia.com.au
ther	14		Opt.			24 (H)	✓		Up to 2	✓	✓	13 37 23	qbe.com
ther	14		Opt., \$100 excess			24 (H)	✓		Up to 2	✓	✓	13 37 23	qbe.com
B)	14	Opt. (E)	Opt.			12	✓		1	After 3 years	✓	13 22 44	aami.com.au
greed	14	Opt. (E)	Opt.			12	✓		1	After 3 years	✓	13 22 44	aami.com.au
ther(C)	14		Opt., \$40 excess			12	✓	✓	2			1800 724 668	budgetdirect.com.au

TABLE NOTES

RACQ declined our invitation to confirm its policy features, so we were unable to give it a score. However, in our member survey it scored 47% for general satisfaction and 72% for claims satisfaction.

na Score not available: not enough people gave satisfaction information about this company.

Opt. Optional, which means this cover isn't included in the premium, but is available for an extra fee.

* Cash is usually excluded.

** NCB = No-claim bonus. For more see How to save on your premium, page 33.

(A) Designed for older consumers (55+); for details check with the insurer.

(B) The higher of the two.

(C) For some cars, only market value is available.

(D) Discounted rental car (if you're 21 or older).

(E) 10 days' optional cover for discounted car rental is available.

(F) Yes, if you're on the maximum no-claim bonus.

(G) There's a limit of 30,000 km in the first 24 months and 50,000 in total.

(H) Up to 20,000 km; optional cover is available for four years.

What to buy \$

Recommended policies have a policy score of 70% or more. Look at the features to find a few of these recommended policies that suit your requirements, then see how they fared in CHOICE's satisfaction survey. Finally, check which ones have a competitive premium for your scenario in your state. Get at least three quotes for comparison, including online quotes, which can be cheaper.

Sale away

Factory outlet shopping centres are challenging traditional CBD retailing. They're a bargain hunter's paradise — just don't let the 'sale' signs go to your head.



nutshell

► If you're prepared to spend some time looking, you can make serious savings at factory outlet centres.

► Beware of overspending. Research shows that while shoppers can save money at these centres, they generally buy more items, voiding any saving they may have made.

Forget your local Westfield: there's a new breed of shopping centre appearing around the country. These creatures have all your favourite labels: Country Road, Villeroy & Boch and Esprit, plus cafés and free parking, but best of all, their stock's on sale all the time — some of it's at more than 70% off. Welcome to the world of factory outlet centres.

They're already a huge success in the US and UK and right now they're booming in Australia, as a growing number of consumers say 'yes' to getting the brands they want for less.

If you live in a capital city, chances are there's already a Brand Smart, Harbour Town or DFO shopping centre near you. And if there isn't, there's likely to be soon. More and more retailers are tapping into this emerging market, realising it's a great way to offload stock and raise their profile with a fresh set of consumers.

In Australia, major labels use their factory outlet stores to sell last season's stock at discounted prices. You might also find surplus stock from the current season, samples, discontinued lines or faulty goods at outlet centres. Generally, though, faulty merchandise is rare — and it should always be clearly labelled.

In the US, some factory outlets stock a large range of 'seconds' — items with imperfections. Many brands also have stock manufactured especially for their outlet stores, and generally it's of slightly poorer quality than their standard retail lines.

In Australia, factory outlets don't sell as much

second-grade stock. A few retailers such as Sheridan, Orotan and Nine West manufacture product lines especially for their factory outlet stores — mainly because they don't have enough discontinued or out-of-season stock to fill their shelves. But they say this 'made for factory outlet' stock isn't necessarily of a lower quality, it's just not available in their mainstream stores.

Homewares stores at factory outlet centres — Villeroy & Boch and Royal Doulton, for example — stock discontinued lines, but it's not just lurid dinnerware sets or outdated designs that end up there. You can find popular patterns, purely because big retailers like Myer and David Jones have to make room for new designs. The outlet retailers also stock some lines that the big retailers have chosen not to buy in.

Who goes there — and why?

You'll find most factory outlet shopping centres out in the suburbs, so chances are you'll have to invest time and petrol to get to one. Most offer one-stop shopping, stocking everything from sportswear and fashion labels to crockery and electrical appliances, all at a discount of up to 70% or more.

For many Australians, shopping is a leisure activity and going to one of these centres has become a weekend excursion for the whole family. On Saturdays and Sundays, they're packed — so if crowds are your idea of shopping hell, only attempt factory outlet retail therapy during the week. >

Here's how we saved

A casual look for him: Rodd & Gunn



COST \$497
SAVING \$270

	WHAT WE PAID	RRP	SAVING
Chinos	\$99	\$159	\$60
Shirt	\$99	\$149	\$50
Jacket	\$299	\$459	\$160

Work-smart for her: Jigsaw



COST \$335
SAVING \$362

	WHAT WE PAID	RRP	SAVING
Top	\$100	\$179	\$79
Jacket	\$156	\$329	\$173
Trousers	\$79	\$189	\$110

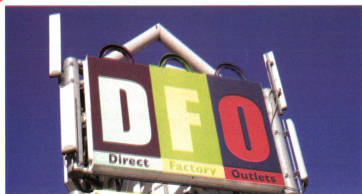
Faulty stock is rare in factory outlets, and should always be clearly labelled.

Cool for kids: Pumpkin Patch



COST \$48
SAVING \$26

	WHAT WE PAID	RRP	SAVING
Long-sleeved T-shirt	\$15	\$20	\$5
Zip-front hoodie	\$16	\$27	\$11
Jeans	\$17	\$27	\$10



HOW MUCH CAN YOU EXPECT TO SAVE?

CHOICE went shopping at a factory outlet centre to find out what savings you can expect. We bought an entire outfit for a man, woman and child. The quoted recommended retail price (RRP) is what was displayed on the original label, and is what you would have paid if you'd bought the item at full price, in season, at a mainstream retail store.

Total cost for the three outfits \$880

RRP \$1538

Saving \$658

'Made for factory outlet' stock isn't necessarily of a lower quality, it's just not available in mainstream stores.

< Research at the Australian Centre for Retail Studies shows that the average shopper spends one hour and \$30–\$50 at a normal shopping centre, compared to three to four hours and \$200–\$300 at a factory outlet centre. If you're from out of town, you might spend as much as \$700.

Shoppers make the journey to these centres thinking: "It's going to be worth my while — I'm going to get a bargain." This puts them in a good mood, and when you're in a good mood you're in the right frame of mind to buy.

Shoppers are likely to have saved up for their shopping trip and gone in with a 'what to buy' list. These bargain hunters are primed and ready to spend time browsing — and they need to. There's a lot of stock and you have to be prepared to pick through it to find what you want. You may not find an outfit that's in the pages of the latest *Vogue*, but you can pick up well-known Australian labels like Oroton, Rodd & Gunn, Jigsaw and Pumpkin Patch at a cut price.

There's no doubt you can save money, but the low prices can tempt you into buying things you didn't plan to. And buying more items means you may end up spending more, rather than making savings.

Shopping seduction

Supermarkets are notorious for designing their stores to maximise 'impulse buys' or 'unplanned purchases'. Factory outlet centres also roll out all the retailing tricks to get you in and keep you there — after all, the most important factor in determining how much consumers buy is how long they spend in a shop.

- **Sale signs** We've become psychologically programmed to react to signs in shops — sale signs in particular. But displaying any kind of sign is likely to lure a shopper inside a store as it suggests a 'shopping event' may be in progress.
- **Price points** We also respond to psychologically sensitive price points like \$99.99 — and you'll see plenty of them at factory outlets.



SHOPPING RIGHTS AT FACTORY OUTLETS

Most outlet shops display their returns and exchange policy — and they vary, so they're worth a read. Some have the same policy as their normal retail shop. Others have a stricter 'no returns' policy — but even these stores must comply with the laws that protect consumer rights.

- Any item you buy must match what's promised by its label or packaging, otherwise you're entitled to a refund.
- You're also entitled to a refund for anything that's faulty or not of 'merchantable' quality — unless it's clearly labelled as a faulty item or 'second'.
- If you simply change your mind, you aren't entitled to a refund or exchange, but some retailers will give you one anyway.

- **Compulsory browsing** Shopping centres are commonly designed around a 360° pathway so that, unless you double back, you have to walk past every single shop before you reach an exit.
- **Right is right** Consumers like to touch merchandise, so shops often get better results by laying out the store so that consumers explore it in a counter-clockwise direction. This puts the touching hand, usually the right, closest to the stock. Shoppers have also been found to drift towards, and look to, the right.
- **The comfort zone** If you're rummaging through racks for hours, strategically placed couches on the centre thoroughfare can provide some welcome respite — which in turn gives you the energy to keep shopping. You can also use them to offload weary partners and children while the serious business of retail therapy continues.
- **Fuel stop** Factory outlets want you to refuel quickly and keep shopping. You won't be settling in for a long, three-course lunch — it's all quick eats and functional but not-too-comfortable tables and chairs.

How to bag a real bargain

- **Fight back** Shoppers aren't simply slaves to the retail planners. We now pride ourselves on seeing through cynical marketing exercises. We do product research on the internet or ask family and friends for advice, and we're less likely to be brand-loyal than we used to be.
- **Plan ahead** Shopping can cause the brain to release dopamine, the same pleasure pathway activated by food, sex and drugs. That's why it feels good, and why you need tools to rein you in. Go in with a budget and a list of products you hope to buy and try to stick to it.
- **Monitor yourself** Be aware of your behaviour — ask yourself why you're shopping. Is it to make you feel better? Are you shopping for things you need? Are you purely on the hunt for a bargain? Buying for pleasure is fine as long as that's what you planned to do.
- **Cooling off** If you're not sure about a purchase, give yourself some cooling-off time — even if it's just 10 minutes — and ask yourself (and your shopping partner) if you really need it.
- **When enough's enough** Partly because of the dopamine 'rush', people can develop a shopping addiction or 'compulsive buying disorder', which can lead to serious debt. This needs to be treated like any other behavioural addiction — by seeking professional help. ■

On test

Home entertainment, whitegoods, household and personal appliances: they're all tested here.

Inside

40 Juicers



44 DVD/hard disc recorders



53 Fridges



Plus

46 Electric lawnmowers

50 Air conditioners

60 Pumps for rainwater tanks

PHOTOGRAPH: GENE RUSS

ELECTRIC MOWERS
TEST PAGE 46

CHOICE has its own testing laboratories, where experienced technical staff put products through their paces. We use test methods from Australian standards, as well as developing our own in order to match the way consumers use a product in real life. To maintain our independence from manufacturers, we buy most of the products we test, and also get to know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

For more product tests go to choice.com.au

Pulp friction

Some non-centrifugal juicers extract more nutrients.

nutshell

► **CHOICE** put the squeeze on 12 medium to high-end juicers priced up to \$750. They all did well, with even the worst getting a good score. ► We explain about different types of juicers and their pros and cons.

Rising rates of obesity, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and cancer have led to fruit and vegetables being promoted as a national dietary priority because they're packed with vitamins, minerals and fibre. The Cancer Council says increasing your daily intake by just 50 g (that's a third of a cup of veg, or a third of a piece of fruit) can cut your cancer risk by 20%.

Against this backdrop, sales of fresh juices have really taken off. Boost Juice, for example, first started selling fresh juices in 2000 and now has 180 stores around Australia. As a medium-size juice can cost around \$5, making your own is an appealing alternative.

Freshly squeezed juices are a quick and convenient way to get a glassful of easily absorbed nutrients. But juice isn't a substitute for solid fruits and vegies because fibre from fruit and vegies is mostly lost in the juicing

process. Fruit also contains natural sugars, which become more concentrated when made into juice, providing a big kilojoule and sugar hit — especially for children.

We chose 12 medium to high-priced electric juicers from a wide range of manufacturers and types, priced between \$100 and \$749. Eight were high-speed centrifugal juicers, one was a masticating juicer and three were the cold-press style.

What's the difference between juicers? Centrifugal juicers

The most common and affordable type is the **centrifugal** juicer, whose rotating blade cuts the fruit and vegetables and pushes them against a strainer at very high speeds.

Non-centrifugal juicers

Non-centrifugal juicers can be either a **masticating** (chewing) or a **cold-press** style. Although still fast, masticating juicers run at a slower rate than most centrifugal juicers. The CHAMPION 2000+ is the only masticating juicer we tested. It uses a combination of tooth-like blades and a fine sieve. Makers of masticating juicers claim they break down fibre more thoroughly than centrifugal juicers, to release more nutrients.

Cold-press style juicers use a slow-turning auger (a screw-like device), also called a gear, to crush or squeeze the fruit or veg. They push the pulp through a tight cap and the juice filters through a sieve into a bowl. The HEALTHSTART Compact and the OSCAR 900 Vitalmax are single-gear cold-press-style juicers. The most expensive juicers on the market are twin-gear juicers like the GREENPOWER HIPPOCRATES GPT-E1303. These juicers have two gears that rotate inwards, leaving a very small gap between them. They crush and grind produce to extract its juice.

Did you know?

- **You can cook with pulp.** Vegie pulp can be used in mince dishes or meatloaf, to thicken soups or sauces or to make stock. Apple and other fruit pulps can go into muffin, biscuit or cake mixtures to add sweetness and cut down on cane sugar.
- **Pulp makes a great soil improver** for your garden, although pulp from very pungent or acidic foods such as citrus fruits and onions shouldn't be composted.

What to look for

THE BASICS

- As few parts as possible, which fit together and dismantle easily. Parts should be easy to clean, with no corners or crevices to trap food and shelter bacteria.
- It's best if the blade/sieve and pulp surround or pulp container can be removed together, so you don't drip pulp or juice over the bench.
- Make sure the pulp container is a practical size, so you don't have to keep stopping the machine to empty it.
- If the juicer doesn't come with a juice jug, check that the spout is positioned to fit over a decent-size jug.

USEFUL FEATURES

- Make sure the blade assembly can't be easily touched through the chute, especially by little fingers.
- Cord storage is handy for keeping your bench uncluttered.
- A control switch at the front is easier to reach quickly than one at the back.



Manufacturers claim cold-press-style machines' juice is more nutritious and will stay fresh and tasty up to 48 hours. Their gentle, slow-turning action is said to retain more vitamins, minerals, enzymes, phytochemicals and fibre than in juice produced by other methods. Their argument is that high-speed centrifugal juicers heat up the juice, allow air to enter and therefore cause damage to some of the perishable nutrients. We tested this claim.

Double the calcium

We sent a sample of carrot juice from each juicer to a lab to be analysed for minerals (potassium and calcium), vitamin C and the phytochemicals alpha and beta-carotene, to see if the non-centrifugal juicers extracted more nutrients. The juice from all the non-centrifugal juicers did contain around double — in some cases triple — the calcium of the centrifugally produced juices (bar one, the MAGIMIX).

The GREENPOWER HIPPOCRATES' juice contained well over double the beta-carotene and alpha-carotene of the juice from every other juicer in the test. Potassium was much the same for all juices tested and vitamin C amounts in all were too low to measure accurately.

A sample of apple juice from each juicer was refrigerated for 48 hours, then evaluated for colour, overall appearance, smell and texture, to test claims that juice from non-centrifugal juicers stays drinkable longer.

The apple juice from the centrifugal juicers separated and went brown within a few minutes. After two days it was noticeably deteriorating, didn't smell fresh, had a hard froth on top (except juice from the MAGIMIX) and sediment at the bottom. By contrast, the juice from the non-centrifugal juicers didn't separate, smelt fresh and looked palatable and green after 48 hours in the fridge, indicating less oxidation. It's possible that the oxidation or friction from higher-speed centrifugal juicers turns the juice bad faster than the slow-turning machines.

Benefits of non-centrifugal juicers

- Non-centrifugal juicers are mostly more expensive than centrifugal models. Despite this, they have a smaller chute size and no dishwasher-safe parts or cord storage.
- They're also slower at processing. So why buy one?
- If you store your juice rather than drinking it soon after making it, one of these machines would suit you.
- Some can be used for food processing, mincing, grinding coffee beans, and making sausages, pasta/noodles, seasonings, soy milk, baby food, ice cream.
- They have fewer parts and are easier to clean.
- Cold-press ones can juice wheatgrass and herbs.
- Their warranties are generally longer.
- They're much quieter. >

What to buy \$

CENTRIFUGAL

BREVILLE Ikon Juice Fountain BJE510	\$249
BREVILLE 800 Class 800JE	\$530
DELONGHI JE850M	\$199
SUNBEAM Café Juice JE7600	\$199
SUNBEAM Café Series JE8900	\$299
KAMBROOK Twin Speed Juicer KJE40	\$100

BEST BUY

While the KAMBROOK's score isn't quite as high as the others, it works well and we think it's great value at half the price of its nearest contender.

NON-CENTRIFUGAL

GREENPOWER HIPPOCRATES GPT-E1303	\$749
OSCAR 900 Vitalmax (Chrome)	\$540

Profiles

Non-centrifugal juicers



GREENPOWER HIPPOCRATES GPT-E1303

PRICE \$749
GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for orange, carrot and pineapple/watermelon juice, and very good for apple juice.
- 12-year warranty on motor, five years parts and labour.
- Very good instructions, with DVD.
- Large pulp container and good-sized jug.
- Juices wheatgrass, barley grass, alfalfa, and seeds such as sesame and pumpkin.
- Can operate as a food processor, meat mincer, soy milk and tofu maker, frozen dessert and baby food maker, and pepper and coffee grinder.
- Good levels of tested nutrients in juice.

BAD POINTS

- Narrow chute, and no cord storage.
- Some cracks and crevices trap dirt.



OSCAR 900 Vitalmax (Chrome)

PRICE \$540
GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for orange, apple, carrot and pineapple/watermelon juice.
- Other uses include mincing, chopping, sausage making, noodles/pasta, fruit ice creams, purées and desserts.
- 20-year warranty on motor, five years parts and labour.
- Different strainers for different functions, such as juicing and mincing.
- Juices wheatgrass, barley grass, alfalfa.
- Easy to clean.
- Good calcium levels in juice.

BAD POINTS

- Narrow chute, and no cord storage.
- Small juice jug and pulp container.

Makers claim the juice from cold-press-style machines is more nutritious and will stay fresh and tasty for up to 48 hours.

Profiles

Centrifugal juicers



BREVILLE Ikon Juice Fountain BJE510

PRICE \$249

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for carrot and pineapple/watermelon juice, and a very good result for orange and apple juice.
- Large chute.
- Very clear controls.
- Large juice jug and pulp container.
- Very comprehensive instructions.
- All parts are dishwasher-safe.

BAD POINTS

- Large, bulky parts are hard to hand wash.
- Blade is accessible.



BREVILLE 800 Class 800JE

PRICE \$530

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for pineapple/watermelon juice, and a very good result for carrot, orange and apple juice.
- Large chute.
- Large juice jug and pulp container.
- Very comprehensive instructions.
- Some parts are dishwasher-safe.

BAD POINTS

- Large, bulky parts are hard to hand wash.
- Expensive.
- Blade is accessible.



DELONGHI JE850M

PRICE \$199

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for apple and pineapple/watermelon juice, and a very good result for orange and carrot juice.
- Large chute.
- Some parts are dishwasher-safe.
- Large juice jug and pulp container.

BAD POINTS

- Fiddly to assemble.
- Large, bulky parts are hard to hand wash.
- Blade is accessible by smaller hands.

All the centrifugal juicers have large, bulky parts that are hard to fit into a domestic sink for hand washing.

PRODUCT		PERFORMANCE			FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS	
Brand/model (in rank order within groups)	Type	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Speeds	Dishwasher-safe	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*	Weight (kg)
CENTRIFUGAL JUICERS								
Breville Ikon Juice Fountain BJE510	Centrifugal	83	85	80	5	✓ (B)	44 x 35 x 20	5.1
Breville 800 Class 800JE	Centrifugal	81	83	78	2	✓ (C)	43 x 35 x 20	6.6
Delonghi JE850M	Centrifugal	80	85	74	2	✓ (C)	46 x 36 x 21	5.8
Sunbeam Café Juice JE7600	Centrifugal	80	83	76	2	✓ (B)	41 x 32 x 22	5.3
Sunbeam Café Series JE8900	Centrifugal	80	83	76	2	✓ (B)	41 x 32 x 22	5.7
Kambrook Twin Speed Juicer KJE40	Centrifugal	75	80	70	2	✓ (D)	38 x 30 x 22	3.7
Morphy Richards 48951	Centrifugal	75	80	70	2	Not stated	40 x 24 x 34	5.6
Magimix Le Duo Plus	Centrifugal	71	83	58	1	✓ (E)	33 x 21 x 20	5.4
NON-CENTRIFUGAL JUICERS								
Greenpower Hippocrates GPT-E1303	Cold-press, twin-gear	80	90	70	2 (A)		32 x 20 x 39	6.5
Oscar 900 VitalMax (Chrome)	Cold-press, single-gear, two-step auger	78	90	66	2 (A)		22 x 18 x 26	6.1
Champion 2000+	Single auger, masticating	74	85	62	1		30 x 20 x 49	9.7
Healthstart Compact	Similar to cold-press, single auger	72	78	66	2 (A)		24 x 18 x 25	4.3

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Performance score: 50%
- Ease of use score: 50%

Price Recommended retail, as of September 2007.

TABLE NOTES

* Doesn't include juice jug.

(A) On/reverse.

(B) All parts on the top shelf only.

(C) All plastic parts except the pusher on the top shelf only.

(D) Pulp container and juice jug on the top shelf only.

(E) All removable parts on a short program at 50°C.


SUNBEAM Café Juice JE7600
PRICE \$199

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for pineapple/watermelon juice, and a very good result for carrot, apple and orange juice.
- Large chute.
- All parts are dishwasher-safe.
- Large juice jug and pulp container.

BAD POINTS

- Large, bulky parts are hard to hand wash.
- Blade is accessible.


SUNBEAM Café Series JE8900
PRICE \$299

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for pineapple/watermelon juice, and a very good result for carrot, orange and apple juice.
- Large chute.
- All parts are dishwasher-safe.
- Large juice jug and pulp container.

BAD POINTS

- Large, bulky parts are hard to hand wash.
- Blade is accessible.

BEST BUY

KAMBROOK Twin Speed Juicer KJE40
PRICE \$100

GOOD POINTS

- Very good result for carrot, orange, apple and pineapple/watermelon juice.
- Large chute.
- Pulp container and juice jug are dishwasher-safe.

BAD POINTS

- No cord storage.
- Small hands can reach the blade.
- Cracks and crevices trap dirt.
- Small juice jug and pulp container.
- Large, bulky parts are hard to hand wash.

Juice from the non-centrifugal juicers still looked and smelt palatable after 48 hours.

About the rest

- Although the MORPHY RICHARDS has a large chute and produces reasonable-quality juice, you only get a relatively small amount. It's also large and bulky.
- The MAGIMIX's juice had a higher level of calcium than juice from the other centrifugal juicers, but the model scored the lowest for ease of use. It doesn't come with a juice jug, has a small chute, the motor unit has cracks and crevices where dirt can accumulate, and the filter's difficult to clean thoroughly.
- The CHAMPION and the HEALTHSTART produced juice containing high levels of calcium, and apple juice from both looked and smelt palatable after 48 hours. Although easy to clean, they're expensive, have a small chute, no cord storage and no dishwasher-safe parts. The HEALTHSTART scored the lowest for the juice produced because its carrot juice was a little grainy and it produced a lower quantity.

HOW WE TESTED

- Our tester processed a kilogram each of carrots, apples, oranges and a combination of watermelon and pineapple in each juicer. From these she could evaluate each juicer's abilities across a range of textures and consistencies.
- **Performance** involved rating each juice for the quantity produced, its clarity and texture — our tester was looking for a smooth juice, not a pulpy, grainy or frothy one.
- **Ease of use** included 'feeding' (the size of the chute and how small she had to chop up the produce to fit); assembly and disassembly of parts; cleaning; use of controls; collecting juice and removing pulp.
- **Safety** Each juicer was also assessed to see how easy it was for hands of various sizes to come into contact with the blades through the food chute when it was fully assembled. Safety wasn't scored, but you'll find comments in the profiles.



PHOTOGRAPHY: GENE RUSS

(all www.)	Price (\$)
eville.com.au	249
eville.com.au	530
longhi.com.au	199
nbeam.com.au	199
nbeam.com.au	299
mbrook.com.au	100
orphyrichards.com.au	199
mbur.com.au	399
ality4life.com.au	749
ality4life.com.au	540
ality4life.com.au	590
health.com.au	349



The big gig

A DVD recorder with a 160 GB hard drive gives you hundreds of hours of recording capacity.

nutshell

► These DVD/hard disc recorders only receive analogue TV, but you'd get four to six years' use out of them before analogue broadcasting is closed down.

► There's very little difference in the overall scores, and all scored well. Choose one according to what's important to you.

Using a DVD player to play movies with a separate VCR to record TV shows is, like, so five years ago. If you feel you've been lingering too long in this technology time warp you might be considering an upgrade to a DVD recorder. But throw in a 160 GB hard disc drive (HDD) as well, and you'll have literally hundreds of hours of recording capacity at your disposal.

You can record TV programs onto the hard disc, and copy ('dub') the ones you want to keep onto DVD. Or you could flop onto the sofa and enjoy a cornucopia of prerecorded HDD entertainment at the touch (or two) of a button — no need to fiddle around with DVDs.

The 160 GB hard drives of the four models we tested give you a maximum recording time of over 450 hours on two of them. But there's a high level of compression to fit this much in and the image quality wouldn't be very good. For a good (VHS-like) quality image you're looking at more like 140-odd hours of storage capacity.

All models scored equally for quality of recording of broadcast TV and its playback. However, the playback quality of each could probably be improved with an HDMI (around \$60) or component (\$30) cable, instead of the composite cable supplied.

The faulty disc test (see *How we tested*, far right) sorted the sheep from the goats, with the LG scoring very

well, the others rather poorly — hence the LG getting the top score for performance.

Generally speaking, the models are easy to use, with menus that are easy to navigate and intuitive — there was little need to refer to the manual. Here, the LG didn't score quite as well as the rest: the remote control is a little awkward and you can't record direct to DVD (you have to dub from HDD). The PIONEER stood out for copying and recordings management, mainly because it's possible to set up a list of programs for copying or deletion (with others you can only do one at a time).

What about digital broadcasting?

Analogue TV is to be phased out between 2012 and 2014, so buying one of these analogue models now would give roughly four to six years of use as is. The relatively cheap addition of a set-top box later means you'd be able to receive digital TV when analogue's a thing of the past. You could even consider it now if you want to watch ABC2, action from Parliament House and other digital treats.

Digital standard-definition (SD) DVD/HDD recorders currently cost about \$800 — so at the moment it's cheaper to go with the analogue model plus a set-top box. All the models in our test can receive and record digital transmission via a set-top box. ■

What to look for

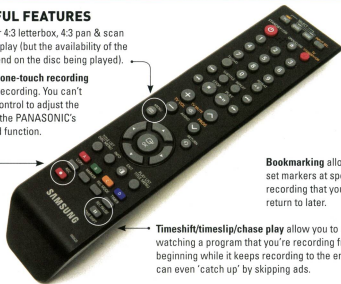
All models have these features unless otherwise specified in the table, far right.

WHAT WILL THEY PLAY?

- **Plays DivX files** DivX is a file format commonly used for movies and TV shows you can download from the internet.
- **Plays discs encoded for regions relevant to you** The SAMSUNG and LG models don't play DVDs from regions 1 (the US/Canada) or 6 (China); the LG doesn't play region 5 DVDs either (this region includes the former Soviet states, Eastern Europe, India, most of Africa, North Korea and Mongolia). However, both LG and SAMSUNG point out there are websites that provide codes to enable your DVD player to play all regions — but use them at your own risk. The PIONEER and PANASONIC models have no regional restrictions.

OTHER USEFUL FEATURES

- **Menu options** for 4:3 letterbox, 4:3 pan & scan and 16:9 ratio display (but the availability of the feature can depend on the disc being played).
- **Simple, quick or one-touch recording** as well as timer recording. You can't use the remote control to adjust the time when using the PANASONIC's one-touch record function.



Bookmarking allows you to set markers at spots in the recording that you want to return to later.

Timeshift/timeslip/chase play allow you to start watching a program that you're recording from the beginning while it keeps recording to the end. You can even 'catch up' by skipping ads.

What to buy

The models tested have their relative strengths and weaknesses, so we've profiled all of them. All could benefit from a better cable than the composite one supplied.



PIONEER DVR-550H-S

PRICE \$549

GOOD POINTS

- Upscales to 1080p, which enhances the DVD signal to the best-quality picture that high-end TVs are capable of displaying. You'll need to buy an HDMI cable, and your TV needs to have HDMI input, to make the most of this feature.
- Plays DVDs from all regions.
- Uses the least energy while on standby.
- USB port allows easy connection of digital cameras, printers, keyboards, PCs and USB keys.
- Easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Let down by its score for playing a faulty DVD.



SAMSUNG DVD-HR753

PRICE \$499

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Poor score for playing a faulty DVD.
- Doesn't record onto +R/RW format discs (though it does play them).



LG RH277H

PRICE \$499

GOOD POINTS

- Very good score for playing a faulty DVD.
- USB port allows easy connection of digital cameras, printers, keyboards, PCs and USB keys.
- It has the most HDD recording time.

BAD POINTS

- You can't record broadcast TV direct to DVD — you have to record to HDD, then dub to DVD.



PANASONIC DMR-EH57K

PRICE \$659

GOOD POINTS

- Upscales to 1080p (see PIONEER, above)
- Plays DVDs from all regions.
- Easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- Uses the most energy while on standby.

HOW WE TESTED

- Our testers used the models to record broadcast analogue TV programs to the hard disc drive and direct to DVD (if the model allowed it). Then they evaluated the quality of the recordings.
- They assessed digital viewing and recording using a digital set-top box and the supplied composite cable.
- They evaluated all the ease of use components [see *Ease of use* score, below, for details].
- They played DVDs with different region codes to check how the machines coped with them.
- The testers also used a DVD with deliberately produced faults to test the players' ability to cope with discs that might be dirty and/or scratched — as you might encounter when renting from the local video store, say.
- They also measured standby energy consumption.

USING THE TABLE

Overall score The overall score is a combination of:

- Ease of use: 50%
- Performance: 40%
- Standby energy score: 10%

Ease of use score A panel

assessed the following:

- Remote control: 25%
- Recording direct to HDD: 20%
- Onscreen display: 10%
- Recordings management: 10%
- Copying from HDD to DVD: 7%
- Initial setup and tuning: 5%
- Front panel controls: 5%
- Front panel display: 5%
- Recording direct to DVD: 5%
- User manual: 5%
- Copying from DVD to HDD: 3%

Performance score This is

made up as follows:

- Playback quality: 80%
- Faulty DVD: 20%

Playback quality is based on tests of the recorder's ability to produce good-quality images, recorded and played back from visual test signals at its lowest, medium and high (not highest) compression for DVD recordings.

The faulty DVD test checked how well recorders could handle a DVD with imperfections.

Standby energy score Testers measured the power each machine uses in standby mode or equivalent (when it's been turned off by the remote control but is still connected to the power). The higher the score, the lower the energy consumption.

Price Recommended retail, as of September 2007. Shop around: we paid a lot less.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS					
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Performance score (%)	Standby energy score (%)	Records TV direct to DVD	Plays DVD regions	Plays DivX	Maximum claimed recording hours	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Hard disc capacity (GB)	Contact	Price (\$)	
	Pioneer DVR-550H-S	73	79	64	80	✓	All	✓	455	8 x 42 x 30	4.3	160	www.pioneer.com.au	549
	LG RH277H	72	67	78	70	✓	2, 3, 4	✓	477	6 x 43 x 31	3.8	160	www.lge.com.au	499
	Samsung DVD-HR753	71	75	67	70	✓	2, 3, 4, 5	✓	264	6 x 43 x 31	3.9	160	www.samsung.com.au	499
	Panasonic DMR-EH57K	70	73	70	50	✓	All	✓	284	6 x 43 x 31	4.1	160	www.panasonic.com.au	659



Mower power

Plug them in or charge them up — electric lawnmowers are great for your suburban backyard.

nutshell

► Electric mowers are very convenient for smaller yards: you don't need to store petrol for them and they cut grass well. Cordless battery-operated models are even easier to use than mains-powered ones, but generally more expensive. ► Do you need a lawn anyway? You'll save lots of water if you don't have one, but we've got some water-saving tips if you still want your own green belt.

They're fume-free, they start at the press of a button, are comparatively quiet, tend to vibrate less than petrol mowers, and some of the models we tested are very compact and lightweight — all of which makes an electric lawnmower a convenient option if you have a small to medium-sized yard. They're pretty good at cutting grass too.

CHOICE tested 13 models, 11 of which use a power cord, plus two that run on a rechargeable battery. In the grass-cutting stakes, the best performers were comparable to petrol mowers. All the mowers cut short and medium-length grass well, but the hover mowers really struggled with long grass.

The two battery-powered models — the ENVIROMOWER and the MASPORT Phoenix Cordless — won out for ease of use, largely because they don't have a power cord, which can wrap itself around shrubs and trees (and your legs). However, if your lawn is compact and more or less obstacle-free, a power cord needn't be too much of an issue.

You could easily mow the lawn on the old standard suburban quarter-acre block with one of these machines, but if your garden's any bigger, you'll probably find it a nuisance to drag around a cord. And while the battery-powered models we tested can certainly manage a large lawn, you'll need to plan ahead and charge them overnight.

What to buy \$

ENVIROMOWER Enviro 500 ECO500Y (cordless)	\$599
FLYMO RE370 U371EL	\$299
MASPORT Phoenix Cordless	\$499
VICTA Tornado Electric EBP360A	\$499
VICTA Lawnkeeper Electric ESP360A	\$179
VICTA Lawnkeeper Electric ESP300A	\$139
TALON Eagle Cut & Catch AM2053	\$199

BEST BUY

The ENVIROMOWER and MASPORT are great for convenience, with no power cord to drag around, but they're pretty expensive. The \$139 VICTA Lawnkeeper ESP300A, on the other hand, cuts just as well and is very good value, with the VICTA Lawnkeeper ESP360A (\$179) and TALON Eagle (\$199) costing only slightly more.

Making adjustments

In general, adjusting the cutting height on electric mowers is more difficult than for petrol models. The ENVIROMOWER is by far the easiest — you just use a lever. The GMC, TALON and VICTA Tornado Electric are also reasonably easy, as their height adjuster alters all four wheels at once.

With the rest of the models tested, it's a different story. The two VICTA Lawnkeeper Electric models, for example, need to be turned over so you can reposition their front and rear spring-loaded axles. With other models, you need to remove wheels or use a spanner to put spacers under their cutting blade.

If you're likely to adjust the cutting height of your mower at some point, ask the salesperson to demonstrate in the shop.

To lawn or not to lawn?

Before you rush out and buy a new mower in these water-restricted times, consider whether you need a lawn at all. While grass does prevent soil erosion, it can consume up to 90% of your garden's water. It also needs regular mowing and fertilising to look its best.

If you have children who need a play area or you use your grass areas a lot, you probably think keeping your lawn lush and green is worth the time, effort and water. But if you only go for a stroll on your grass monthly or fortnightly, it's worth considering replacing at least some of your lawn area with a garden bed, paving or drought-resistant ground cover.

If you decide to keep your lawn, here are some tips to keep it healthy and your water use low:

- Choose a warm-season lawn variety that requires less watering, such as couch or Sir Walter Buffalo.
- Don't cut grass too short. Keeping it at 4 cm or longer will leave the roots shaded and reduce evaporation.
- Use lawn clippings as a mulch to reduce water loss.
- Water your lawn early in the morning or in the evening, when it's cooler.
- Give your lawn long, infrequent soaks, rather than watering it every day.
- Use a timer or an alarm clock to avoid leaving sprinklers on overnight.

- Install a water tank for watering your garden (see page 60).
- Keep the blades on your mower sharp — if grass is torn rather than cut, it can be more susceptible to disease.
- Use a wetting agent such as SaturAid to ensure tap water or rain water soaks deeply into the soil.
- Embrace your brown lawn — it isn't dead, it's just dormant and will spring back to life when it rains.

Who needs a garden anyway?

Many new home builders are opting for less lawn, but it's not for environmentally sustainable reasons: it's so they can build a bigger house.

Research at Queensland's Griffith University has revealed that new home builders are erecting houses that cover up to 65% of their block, which may leave a gap of only one or two metres around their house. Traditionally, houses occupied 35% of a standard suburban block, leaving the rest for garden and lawn.

The rise of McMansions with massive floorspaces began in the 1990s and appears to be unique to Australia. The trend isn't being mirrored in the US, despite its similar suburban sprawl.

While a gardenless state may save water, researchers say the loss of trees and gardens can have a serious impact on the local ecology, drainage and microclimate. So maybe you need that small strip of garden after all. >

HOW WE TESTED



Cutting CHOICE's expert testers put all the models through their paces on specially prepared areas of short, medium and long grass. If the mower came with a catcher, this was used during the short and medium-length tests. Our testers also rated the appearance of the grass after the short and medium grass tests.

Ease of use The testers checked handle vibrations, ease of pushing and manoeuvring, handle comfort, controls, ease of adjusting the cutting height, the catcher, and the convenience of the power source. They weighed the mowers and measured the cutting height range and how close they cut to a vertical wall at the front and the sides. They also measured noise at 7.5 m away and at the operator's ear level.

What to look for

USEFUL FEATURES

- The handle should be adjustable, turned up and comfortable to hold.
- Ideally, the catcher should be made of rigid plastic; with a bag-type catcher you can get showered in dust. It should have two handles, one for carrying and one for emptying.

FURTHER OPTIONS

- None of these electric mowers is self-propelled: you need to push them. Check out petrol models if you want a self-propelled option.
- Only one of the tested models has a mulcher (the ENVIRO-MOWER). If mulching is a priority, you may find more petrol than electric models with this function.



Single or dual control levers should blend in with the shape of the handle — this will make a mower easier to use.

Big wheels improve handling on rough ground.

It should be easy to adjust the cutting height without taking the whole mower apart — ideally with just one lever.

Profiles

Cordless (battery-powered) models

ENVIROMOWER Enviro 500 ECO500Y

PRICE \$599

GOOD POINTS

- Best cutting performance with catcher.
- Very good at mulching.
- The easiest to use: very little handle vibration, excellent controls.
- It's easy to adjust the cutting height.

BAD POINTS

- The heaviest mower tested.
- Handle may be a bit low for taller people.
- Control levers are a little narrow.
- The catcher is fiddly to fit.

MASPORT Phoenix Cordless

PRICE \$499

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent cutting performance.
- Very comfortable handle.
- Very good controls.
- The catcher is easy to use.

BAD POINTS

- The equal noisiest model.
- The catcher is comparatively small.
- The worst handle vibration.
- Various problems changing and using (only three) cutting heights.



The two battery-powered mowers are the easiest to use, mainly because they don't have a power cord to wrap around shrubs, trees and your legs.

Mains-powered models

FLYMO RE370 U371EL

PRICE \$299

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent cutting performance.
- Very easy to push and manoeuvre.
- Comfortable handle.
- Excellent controls.

BAD POINTS

- Changing the cutting height is fiddly — you have to move a lever for each wheel.



VICTA Lawnkeeper Electric ESP300A

PRICE \$139

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent cutting performance.
- The quietest.
- Comfortable handle.
- Lightweight and compact.

BAD POINTS

- You have to turn the mower over to change the cutting height.
- The catcher is small and fiddly to fit.
- The narrowest cutting width (300 mm).



BEST BUY

PRODUCT		PERFORMANCE				SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand / model (in rank order)	Type	Overall score (%)	Cutting performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise at 7.5 m from mower / at user's position (dBA)	Number of cutting positions	Cutting height range (mm)	Width of cut (mm)	Weight (kg)
Enviromower Enviro 500 ECO500Y	Battery, wheeled, catcher (B)	86 / 83 (B)	92 / 88 (B)	76	64 / 77	6	15–63	350	24.0
Flymo RE370 U371EL	Electric, wheeled, catcher	82	91	69	63 / 76	6	20–70	370	16.3
Masport Phoenix Cordless	Battery, wheeled, catcher	82	90	69	73 / 85	3	25–55	380	19.6
Victa Tornado Electric EBP360A	Electric, wheeled, catcher	82	92	66	64 / 75	7	14–67	355	18.2
Victa Lawnkeeper Electric ESP360A	Electric, wheeled, catcher	80	91	63	64 / 77	3	19–55	360	12.3
Victa Lawnkeeper Electric ESP300A	Electric, wheeled, catcher	79	90	63	59 / 74	3	19–55	300	10.7
Talon Eagle Cut & Catch AM2053	Electric, wheeled, catcher	78	86	67	72 / 83	6	20–70	340	15.5
Honda HRE370	Electric, wheeled, catcher	76	91	53	64 / 79	3	25–55	365	12.9
AL-KO 38 E Classic (A)	Electric, wheeled, catcher	72	80	59	64 / 76	4	30–72	380	14.9
GMC RC1700	Electric, wheeled, catcher	72	78	64	72 / 85	5	18–66	360	14.8
Flymo Turbo 400 TL400	Electric, hover	67	66	68	64 / 84	5	8–34	400	7.5
Flymo Turbo Lite 350 TL350	Electric, hover	67	66	68	65 / 83	5	8–34	350	7.5
Morrison Hover Mower 552463	Electric, hover	58	65	47	65 / 82	3	12–22	340	6.4

VICTA Tornado Electric EBP360A

PRICE \$499

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent cutting performance.
- Comfortable handle.
- Excellent controls.

BAD POINTS

- Difficult to adjust the cutting height.
- The catcher is fiddly to fit.



VICTA Lawnkeeper Electric ESP360A

PRICE \$179

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent cutting performance.
- Very comfortable handle.

BAD POINTS

- Hard to push on the lowest cutting setting.
- You have to turn the mower over to change the cutting height.
- Only three cutting heights.
- The catcher is fiddly to fit.



TALON Eagle Cut & Catch AM2053

PRICE \$199

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cutting performance.
- Minimal handle vibration.
- Excellent controls.
- Easy to use catcher.

BAD POINTS

- Wobbly handle that some might find too low.
- The cutting height adjuster is difficult to use.
- High-pitched and annoying noise.



About the rest

- The HONDA is excellent at cutting grass but its on/off switch and height adjustment are difficult to use.
- The AL-KO and the GMC tended to lift the odd tuft of grass without cutting it in the short-grass cutting test.
- Two of the hover mowers — the FLYMO Turbo 400 and Turbo Lite 350 — are very light and easy to push, so could be a good choice for an elderly person or someone who's not very strong. They cut medium and short grass well, but can't be fitted with a catcher and tend to leave unsightly clumps of clippings that need to be raked up.
- The plastic locking pins holding the handle to the body of the MORRISON Hover Mower constantly came out during testing.

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Cutting performance score: 60%
- Ease of use: 40%.

Cutting performance is made up of:

- Cutting performance on short grass: 20%
- Cutting performance on medium-length grass: 20%
- Cutting performance on long grass: 10%
- Appearance of short grass: 25%
- Appearance of medium grass: 25%.

Ease of use Testers assessed:

- Handle vibration.
- Manoeuvrability and pushing.
- Handle comfort.
- Controls.
- Grass catcher, if supplied.
- Ease of adjusting the cutting height.
- Convenience of the power source.

Noise The testers measured the noise the mowers made from 7.5 m away and at the operator's ear level. None of the models is as noisy as their petrol counterparts, but ear protection is still a good idea.

Cutting positions/height You can vary the length of grass your mower cuts by adjusting the height of the blade from the ground. These mowers have between three and seven positions, but if you've got areas of lawn you like to cut to different lengths — or you expect to be mowing long grass, which may need to be cut twice — also look at the cutting height range to decide whether the mower will deliver the variety you need. The cutting height is based on the distance between the blade and the bottom of the wheels, not the desired length of grass.

Width of cut You'll be mowing for longer with a narrow mower because it cuts less grass with each push. But it's likely to weigh less, take up less space in the shed and could suit a backyard that has a narrow strip of lawn.

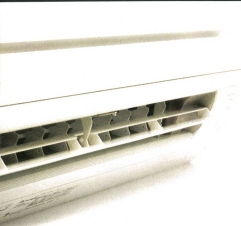
Weight The lighter the mower, the easier it is to push on short and medium grass. However, a light mower will probably struggle if you've been away for a few weeks and the grass has grown dramatically.

TABLE NOTES

(A) Discontinued, but may still be available in shops.

(B) The Enviro mower also mulches. For overall and cutting performance scores, the second number shows the results when the mower is used in mulcher mode.

	Price (\$)
www.enviromower.com.au	599
www.flymo.com	299
www.masport.com.au	499
www.victa.com.au	499
www.victa.com.au	179
www.victa.com.au	139
www.jennfeng.com	199
www.hondampe.com.au	365
www.alko.com.au	199
www.gmcompany.com	199
www.flymo.com	249
www.flymo.com	199
www.morrisonproducts.com.au	160



Cool down now, warm up next winter

If you're buying a large air conditioner, choose one that'll heat your home economically as well as cool it.

nutshell

► On test: eight large split-system, reverse-cycle inverter air conditioners with claimed capacities of around 7 kW for cooling and 8 kW for heating, suitable for large, open-plan living areas.

► Air conditioners not only keep you cool, they're the most efficient form of electric heating.

Australians are increasingly getting air conditioning installed, or moving into a new home that delivers a cooling breeze at the touch of a button. Overall, more than 60% of households now have an air conditioner.

The decade to 2005 saw air conditioner ownership all over Australia leap up. Naturally, levels vary with the climate; in 2005, rates ranged from 92% in the sweltering NT to just 20% in chilly Tasmania (SA 85%, WA 70%, Victoria 61%, Queensland 58%, NSW 54% and ACT 48%).

For the environment and our energy grids, this trend is not good news. Growing use of air conditioning is increasing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions from fossil-fuel-fired electricity generators, which are sent into overdrive to meet demand spikes on sizzling hot days. So before you buy a large air conditioner to keep the summer heat at bay, consider all the other options that might cool you down — insulating your home, shading and draughtproofing doors and windows, installing blinds, curtains or awnings, planting deciduous trees outside windows or glass doors. Perhaps also reduce your air conditioner use in the car — they say if you're less used to being cool in the car, you're less likely to demand it at home.

In the previous two issues of CHOICE, we reported on two other cooling options. Ceiling fans use far less energy than air conditioners and make you feel cooler without reducing the room temperature — they were reviewed in September. A portable air conditioner lets you cool one room at a time, but it's clunky, hard to operate and not particularly energy-efficient — they were in our October issue.

If you can't survive without an air conditioner for those scorching days, choose one that's just as efficient at keeping you warm next winter.

When it's cold outside

In many areas of Australia, winter evenings can get colder than 7°C, which is the outdoor temperature CHOICE used in the past to test air conditioners' heating efficiency, in line with the tests for the energy label. So this year we conducted our tests at the lower outdoor temperature of 2°C instead — also according to the standard — to see how the different models cope with these tougher conditions.

As could be expected, the air conditioners were generally less efficient at the lower outdoor temperature

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE						FEATURES						
	Overall score (%)	Cooling efficiency score (%)	Heating efficiency score (%)	Airflow score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Noise indoors* / outdoors	Maximum capacity (kW)			Number of fan speeds	Fast operation	Quiet operation	Fan only mode
Brand / model (in rank order)							Measured cooling	Measured heating (at 2°C outdoor temperature)	Claimed heating (at 7°C outdoor temperature)				
Airwell XV26RCA/GCXV26RCA (A)	81	88	73	80	77	Medium / medium	6.4	7.3	8.5	5	✓	✓	✓
MHI SRK71ZE-A-S1/SRC71ZE-S1 (B)	80	82	77	86	75	Quieter / medium	6.8	6.6	8.0	5	✓		✓
Fujitsu ASTA24LCC/AOTR24LCC	74	78	67	77	76	Quieter / quieter	6.9	7.1	8.5	4		✓	✓
Daikin FTXS71FVMA/RXS71FVMA	73	74	72	73	74	Medium / quieter	7.0	7.6	8.2	7	✓	✓	✓
Electrolux ESD24HRA	73	72	75	72	73	Medium / medium	6.8	6.0	7.9	4	✓		✓
Toshiba RAV-SM802KRT-E/ RAV-SM802AT-E	69	71	69	63	73	Medium / medium	6.4	6.0	8.0	5	✓	✓	✓
Mitsubishi Electric MSZ-GA71VA/MUZ-GA71VA	63	57	54	80	82	Medium / medium	6.3	5.5	8.1	3			
Carrier 42PQV080X/38VYX080N	62	63	59	62	68	Medium / medium	6.2	6.1	7.6	3			✓

than at 7°C. At 2°C the heat exchange coils in an outdoor unit tend to ice up, so the air conditioner has to defrost them before indoor heating can resume.

In our tests these defrost cycles generally lowered the units' claimed heating capacity by about 10%–30% and their claimed efficiency by about a quarter to a third. The MHI was the most efficient at heating; three others also scored above 70% for heating efficiency — look for one of those if you live in a cold area.

Factors to consider

- **Split systems** consist of an outdoor unit that sits outside and contains all the noisy bits needed to condition the air, plus an indoor unit (or several) connected by a hose and installed on a wall to blow the conditioned air into your room. They're less noisy and more efficient than cheaper window/wall units.
- **Inverter** air conditioners, like the ones in this test, can vary their heating or cooling output to correspond to room conditions. This is more energy-efficient than >



BRAND MISSING

We also tested the PANASONIC CS-E24FKR/CU-E24FKR, but it was discontinued and replaced with another model that wasn't available in time for testing. If you bought it, it scored 77% overall and well for heating and cooling efficiency. It was also the easiest to use in the test, having a very good remote control and timer, but no fan-only mode.

What to buy

All the air conditioners tested were within about 10% of their claimed efficiency. The top-scoring AIRWELL had the best cooling efficiency when working at both full and half capacity. The MHI was almost as efficient at half capacity, making those two models the best for cooling overall. The MHI is the more efficient of the two at heating, if you want to use an air conditioner as your main source of heating too.



**AIRWELL XV26RCA/
GCXV26RCA**

PRICE \$1999

GOOD POINTS

- The best cooling efficiency.
- Good heating efficiency at low outdoor temperatures.
- Very good airflow range.
- The cheapest to run.
- Lots of features.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.



**MHI SRK71ZEA-S1/
SRC71ZE-S1**

PRICE \$2240

GOOD POINTS

- Very good cooling efficiency.
- The best heating efficiency at low outdoor temperatures.
- The best airflow range.
- Comparatively quiet at low fan speed.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.

About the rest

- Of the remaining models, the FUJITSU is the most efficient at cooling a room and it's quieter (both the inside and outside units) than the ELECTROLUX — although this is more efficient at heating.
- Most of the other models are less efficient at both cooling and heating. The MITSUBISHI and CARRIER scored particularly poorly in this respect and are the most expensive to run.

IFICATIONS

cm, H x W x D)	Contact	Yearly running cost (\$)	Price (\$)
x 107 x 24	www.airwell.com.au	330	1999
x 110 x 25	www.mhi.net.au	340	2240
x 100 x 23	www.fujitsu-general.com.au	360	2611
x 105 x 24	www.daikin.com.au	350	2035
x 104 x 23	www.electrolux.com.au	340	1799
x 100 x 23	www.toshiba-aircon.com.au	370	1999
x 110 x 26	www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au	400	2668
x 108 x 20	www.carrier.com.au	400	1899

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Cooling efficiency: 40%
- Heating efficiency: 30%
- Airflow: 20%
- Ease of use: 10%

We weighted cooling efficiency more highly than heating efficiency because reverse-cycle air conditioners are more often used for cooling in Australia.

Measured capacity Reverse-cycle air conditioners are sold with rated heating and cooling capacities — you choose one based on the cooling and heating capacity required for your room(s). Shown in the table is the highest capacity we measured for cooling, and for heating at 2°C, plus the claimed heating capacity at 7°C.

TABLE NOTES

* At the lowest fan setting.

(A) About to be discontinued, but may still be available in some shops.

(B) MHI = Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.

Yearly running costs We calculated how much each model costs to deliver 3000 kWh of cooling and 3000 kWh of heating per year when running at its measured maximum capacity (based on electricity costs of 15 cents/kWh). The figures are worst case for inverters, as their efficiency improves if they don't have to run at full capacity.

We didn't include standby costs (for power used when the air conditioner is plugged in but not operating), as based on previous tests they're likely to be only a few dollars a year. It may still be a good idea to unplug your air conditioner (if possible) when it's not in use for long periods of time.

Price Recommended or average retail, as of August/September 2007.

< older models, which essentially have two settings: 100% of their capacity or 'off'.

- **Efficiency** This tells you how many kilowatts (kW) of cooling or heating an air conditioner provides per kW of electricity it uses. The more stars on the energy label, the more efficient it is and the lower the running costs and greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Airflow** The air conditioner's fan circulates the cooled (or heated) air around the room. Ideally, you want a model with a wide airflow range: from very high to help the room cool down quickly, to very low so there's less noise and no unpleasant draught once you have the right temperature.

The MHI, MITSUBISHI and AIRWELL have the best combination of low and high fan settings. The AIRWELL has the most powerful maximum fan setting, which helps to cool or heat a room quickly. The MHI and MITSUBISHI have a 'low fan' setting with comparatively little airflow, so you're more likely to find a setting that doesn't feel like you're sitting in a wind tunnel, while still moving some air about.

! WANT MORE INFO?

At choice.com.au you can read our articles on heating and cooling options, including calculators that help you estimate the heating and cooling capacity required for your room(s). Type 'heating options' or 'cooling options' in the search box, click on them and then the calculator.

- **Noise** A noisy indoor unit may interfere with your conversation, entertainment or sleep. And most local councils have noise restrictions relating to the use of air conditioners: check before you buy, especially if the outdoor unit has to be installed close to your neighbour. We tested the noise in the units' quietest modes and found the FUJITSU and MHI the quietest indoors and the DAIKIN and FUJITSU the quietest outdoors.
- **Ease of use** The MITSUBISHI scored very well for ease of use; the CARRIER ranked lower than the rest. There's not much difference between the rest. ■

What to look for

IMPORTANT INFO

- **Size/capacity** To get the most from an air conditioner, match its cooling (and, if required, heating) capacity to your room. Models rated more than 2.4 kW (like those tested) can't be plugged into a normal power point, but need a special connection.
- **Energy efficiency** Once you've worked out what capacity you need, compare the star ratings of models of similar capacity — the more stars on the label, the better (see right). Note that star ratings are different for heating and cooling.
- **Automatic de-icing** If you live in a cold area, frost can build up on the outdoor heat exchanger coils in winter if the air conditioner doesn't de-ice (all the tested ones do).



The numbers in the blue and red boxes give the product's cooling and heating capacity. Heating is measured at an outside temperature of 7°C; some labels also show the capacity at 2°C in small print underneath. The higher the number of stars, the more efficient it is — blue stars for cooling, red for heating (efficiency is calculated by dividing the output capacity by the input power).

- **Remote control.**
- **Operating modes**

Auto Automatically chooses the mode required to keep the room at the chosen temperature.

Cool Pumps heat from inside to outside.

Heat Pumps heat from outside to inside.

Dry Dehumidifies the air, while cooling only slightly.

Fan only (all except the FUJITSU and MITSUBISHI) Blows air without heating, cooling or drying — good when you just want a cooling breeze.

- Some models (see the table for details) have settings with reduced noise (quiet operation) and/or extra-high power (fast or jet operation).
- A **sleep mode** adjusts the temperature in several steps (up when cooling, down when heating) so the air conditioner doesn't have to work as hard — or as loudly — when you're sleeping. See the table for which models have this feature.

- **Adjustable louvres** allow the air to be distributed more evenly — point them up with cool air and down with warm. All models in this test let you do this with the remote control, and they have auto-swing.

- **Restart delay** This prevents the air conditioner from starting up again too soon after being switched off.

COMMON FEATURES

Unless it's noted, all the air conditioners tested have the following features:

- A **timer** lets you switch the air conditioner on and off automatically at certain times. All the tested models have one, but there are differences. On the AIRWELL, DAIKIN, ELECTROLUX and CARRIER, it's difficult to see the settings, and on the others there's no indication that they're active.

HOW WE TESTED

Cooling and heating efficiency

Our testers operated the air conditioners continuously at their maximum thermostat and fan settings. The results are a worst-case efficiency scenario for inverter models, as most of the time they'll run at lower than their maximum capacity. The testers used the test room and climate conditions in the Australian standard, measuring and rating the cooling/heating output (in kW) per kW of power used. In addition, they measured the units' cooling efficiency at 50% of the measured capacity.

Airflow They measured the indoor airflow (in L/sec) on the highest and lowest fan settings.

Ease of use They assessed the remote control, instruction manual and timer, as well as the ease of removing and refitting the air filters for cleaning.

Noise The testers measured the indoor unit with the fan on the lowest setting, and of the outdoor unit while it was installed in our test room.



nutshell

► Regardless of its price tag, no tested fridge does everything well. One brand-new \$4390 Smeg model doesn't even have automatic defrost in its freezer.

► Four of the newly tested models have some unusual features, from a built-in TV to extra compartments that can be set to different temperatures. Unfortunately these extras don't guarantee a good fridge.

Chilling out in style

Even a \$7500 fridge isn't perfect, and bells and whistles don't make up for mediocre performance.

Extra-large side-by-side fridges can have through-the-door water and ice dispensers as well as all kinds of other fancy bells and whistles — in this test, one even has its own TV. They look ever so stylish, but CHOICE is more interested in how well they perform their primary duties — maintaining the right temperature to keep your food safe and fresh.

We tested five very large side-by-side fridges and one large model with its freezer below the fresh-food compartment's 'French doors' — each with a through-the-door water dispenser and icemaker. For people on a much tighter budget, or with limited space in their kitchen, we also included four small fridges (less than 300 L) — one of them a CENTREX, but this company has now ceased trading in Australia, leaving three.

Regardless of its price tag, no fridge does everything well. Any choice will involve a degree of compromise — even in a \$5000 fridge. But it's good to know it's possible to find a decent side-by-side fridge for as little as \$1900 (the WESTINGHOUSE WSE6100WA).

Our latest test confirms the general rule that larger fridges outperform their smaller siblings — models under 300 L seem to score particularly low. If you can afford a slightly larger model and it will fit into your available space, CHOICE advises buying one. If not, the LG GN-205SQA is the best of the smaller models tested.

Energy use

Two fridges in this test used more energy than claimed on their energy labels, which could cost \$100 to \$170 more to run over 10 years than you'd have expected.

- The SMEG FAB32 used 32.5% more energy than claimed on its label — an unusually large variation that warrants further investigation. That said, though, it's still very energy-efficient.
- The LG GR-G227TVS used a little over 10% more, just outside the tolerance allowed by the energy label.

The side-by-side WHIRLPOOL 6GD5SHGXSS was the most energy-efficient of the new models, with a particularly good score of 90%. >

What to buy \$

This list includes the best fridges in each size range as well as Best Buys, which are good performers that are comparatively cheap both to buy and run. Where possible we've tried to include both top (T) and bottom (B) freezers in each size range.

The products in the *What to buy* list and Best Buys change from test to test, as new products are released and tested, and older models go off the market.

Less than 300 L

NEW LG GN-205SQA (T) \$624

300–375 L

FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E372B (B) \$1449

FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E331T (T) \$1019

WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V (T) \$1059

376–450 L

WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ423V (T) \$1749

FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E381T (T) \$1179

FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E440T (T) \$1641

WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ393V (T) \$1479

FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E442B (B) \$1705

There are other fridges almost as good as these in this size range — see the table, page 58, and *Missing models*, page 56.

451–525 L

WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ525V (T) \$1799

FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E521T (T) \$1907

ELECTROLUX EBM5100WB (B) \$1749

More than 525 L

NEW FISHER & PAYKEL RF610A (B) \$3599

SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW (B) \$1899

GE GBU20KBRWW (B) \$3899

Side-by-side

WESTINGHOUSE WSE6100WA \$1899

WHIRLPOOL 6ED2FHXRL \$2499

NEW WHIRLPOOL 6GD5SHGXSS \$3799

Pigeon pair

MIELE F 456 i-2 + K 855 iD-1 \$1999/\$2199

WESTINGHOUSE FJ362V + RP432V \$1569/\$1459

Profiles

Newly tested models in the *What to buy* list are profiled here. For profiles of the other models in the list see CHOICE, May 2007, November 2006, May 2006, November 2005, May 2005, November 2004 and May 2003. You'll also find them in the appropriate month under 'Fridges' in the index at choiceextra.com.au.

If you're after a small fridge, the LG is the best overall performer, but see page 53 for more on smaller fridges.

Less than 300 L



LG GN-205SQA

PRICE \$624

GOOD POINTS

- Maintains steady temperatures.
- Good chiller compartment.

BAD POINTS

- The range of desirable temperature settings is slightly limited.
- The controls make it trial and error to set the right temperatures.
- Fresh food can tend to freeze in winter unless you reset the controls.
- Poor crisper humidity.

More than 525 L



FISHER & PAYKEL RF610A

PRICE \$3599

GOOD POINTS

- Fresh food cools down comparatively fast.
- Good temperature range, and the temperature is uniform within each compartment.
- Handles seasonal change well.
- Very good crisper humidity.
- Door and fault alarm.

BAD POINTS

- No chiller compartment.
- Relatively slow icemaker.

Side-by-side



WHIRLPOOL 6GD5SHGXSS

PRICE \$3799

GOOD POINTS

- Very good temperature range.
- Very good crisper humidity.
- The icemaker holds a relatively large quantity of ice.
- Through-the-door ice and water dispenser.
- Maintains steady temperatures.

BAD POINTS

- Slow to cool down fresh food.
- The controls make it trial and error to set the right temperatures.
- Fresh food can get colder in winter unless you reset the controls.
- The chiller compartment is much too warm for highly perishable foods, unless the freezer is set to very cold.

What to look for



WATER/ICE DISPENSER

Some side-by-side and larger fridges have a water and/or ice dispenser on the outside of the door. The advantage is that the door isn't constantly opened for cold water. However, some water dispensers and icemakers/dispensers need to be connected to a tap by a plumber — important to consider before installing or moving your fridge. Also, they can take up almost 30% of your freezer space.

The first glass of water dispensed by the BOSCH KAN58A40AU, FISHER & PAYKEL RF610A and WHIRLPOOL 6GD5SHGXSS is around 10°C or higher, but subsequent glasses are chilled. The MAYTAG GZ2626GEKBS and SAMSUNG SR5752QDUS provided the most glasses of cold water before running warm.

The plumbed-in models come with a filter, which has to be replaced, usually every six months or annually. The BOSCH KAN58A40AU and FISHER & PAYKEL RF610A use a filter that can be replaced with a generic model; others have an inbuilt water filter that might have to be replaced with the manufacturer's proprietary product.

For a general guide to what to look for when buying a fridge and more information on features and accessories, go to choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the articles under 'Fridges' in the index.

About the rest

Of the newly tested models not covered elsewhere in this article:

- **Side-by-side** The BOSCH KAN58A40AU wasn't quite as good as the recommended models. It doesn't have a chiller and has temperature variations in some areas of the fresh-food compartment.
- **Models less than 300 L** The MITSUBISHI MR-H290S and FISHER & PAYKEL E249T had large temperature fluctuations and both were comparatively slow to cool down fresh food.

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

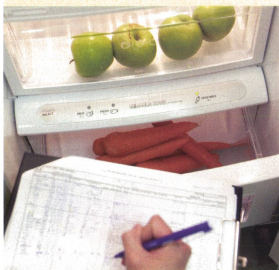
The newly tested fridges were assessed by an occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) for use by people with various disabilities.

- The FISHER & PAYKEL RF610A is recommended for wheelchair users, as the controls are easy to reach, the doors are very easy to open and components are easy to move. It's also recommended for people with limited movement or pain in their arms, as its controls are easy to reach and have soft pushbuttons with audio feedback, and it's easy to reach into.
- For those with vision impairment, the BOSCH KAN58A40AU is a good choice because it has a very large interior for foods to be easily separated. It also has very good interior lighting.
- For those with back pain, the WHIRLPOOL 6GD5SHGXSS is good, as it's easy to reach inside the fridge without bending down. It's also recommended for those with a cognitive impairment, as it's clearly labelled and foods can be easily separated.



The Independent Living Centre's occupational therapist inspects the fridges for use by someone with a disability.

HOW WE TESTED



- **Temperature performance** Our testers checked that you can get an appropriate range of temperatures in the fresh-food and freezer compartments at the same time; assessed temperature fluctuations, as even temperatures are an important factor in maintaining food quality; checked how uniform the temperature was throughout each compartment; and the effect on refrigerator and freezer temperatures when the ambient temperature changes, such as from summer to winter.
- **Fresh-food cooling** They tested the ability of the fridge to quickly cool new warm items added to the fresh-food compartment.
- **Crisper freshness** They also tested how well the crisper keeps unwrapped vegetables from being dried out.
- **Energy efficiency** This was tested to the Australian/New Zealand Standard. The test also checks the energy label that's required by law to be displayed on new fridges.
- **Ease of use** Testers considered three main areas: storage, loading/unloading and general versatility aspects; ease of cleaning; and the ease of understanding and using the controls to obtain appropriate temperatures in varying external conditions.
- **Icemaking and water dispensing** Testers measured the rate of production of ice, the storage capacity of the ice bin, and the number of glasses of cool water that can be dispensed one after another.
- **Built-in television** Testers evaluated the TV on the LG GR-G227TVS for picture quality, sound quality, ease of use and energy consumption on standby.

CHOICE's latest test confirms the general rule that larger fridges outperform their smaller siblings — especially those less than 300 L in size.

Fridges with a difference

The following newly tested fridges didn't make the *What to buy* list, but they've got some special or unusual features.



▶ LG GR-G227TVS

This is a large side-by-side fridge with a 38 cm television mounted into the fresh-food compartment door. Despite its \$7498 price tag, it has very large temperature swings, resulting in a temperature performance score of just 43% — pretty poor for the price. And the LG's television only scored 61% overall: it has good picture quality but poor sound quality, and it doesn't have a built-in digital tuner to receive digital transmissions. It requires an antenna connection to receive free-to-air TV (which most homes are unlikely to have in their kitchen).

MAYTAG GZ26266EKB5 ▶

The MAYTAG (\$7499) is a 'wide-by-side' fridge — its two doors and compartments vary in width, forming a kind of zigzag pattern on the outside.

The point of this is that each compartment has a section that's wider than in a normal side-by-side, making storage of larger items more convenient. Unfortunately this model had large temperature swings, its chiller was too warm and it took a comparatively long time to cool down fresh food.



Special features like a TV or retro look aren't worth paying for if the fridge doesn't do its basic job well.

Missing models

CHOICE has now tested so many fridges, we can't fit them all into one table. In order to give you information about the best models and the newly tested ones, we've dropped from the table some of the models that didn't perform as well, but which are still available in shops. If you see one of them for a good price and are interested in buying it, check its details in May 07 under 'Fridges' in the index at choiceextra.com.au, or in the table in the May 2007 issue of CHOICE. The missing models are shown here with their price and overall score.

376–450 L

- ELECTROLUX EBM4300WB, 74%, \$1379
- FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E402B, 74%, \$1642
- SAMSUNG SR446NW, 74%, \$1199
- WESTINGHOUSE RJ442V, 73%, \$1379
- WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso BJ433V, 72%, \$1799
- SIMPSON SBM4300W, 70%, \$1299
- WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso BJ383V, 70%, \$1589
- ELECTROLUX EBM3800WB, 69%, \$1159
- SIMPSON STM3900WA, 66%, \$1059
- WHIRLPOOL 6WMV43NW, 61%, \$1299

451–525 L

- SIMPSON SBM5100MA, 72%, \$1589
- SAMSUNG SR502NXA, 69%, \$1399
- ELECTROLUX ETM5200WB, 66%, \$1689
- NEC NTM470RVH, 58%, \$1349

More than 525 L

- TOSHIBA GR-M55ADA, 67%, \$1639

Pigeon pair

- FISHER & PAYKEL E388 + E450, 66%, \$1620/\$1589



▲ SAMSUNG SR5752QDUS

The SAMSUNG (\$5999) is unique in that it has four compartments (each with its own cooling system); the two lower ones can be adjusted to suit different uses. For example, you could use one of them as an icemaker (around -5°C) or freezer (-18°C), and the other as a (very large) chiller (around -1°C) or another crisper/fresh-food compartment (3-4°C). You can only choose among a limited number of temperatures for these compartments, though. There's also a small fifth door within the door to the fresh food compartment so that you can grab a drink bottle without opening the main door, but unfortunately this area is too warm for keeping drinks really cold. The freezer was let down by temperature variations.

SMEG FAB32 ▼

This retro-style fridge, available in 10 different colours, looks as if it came from grandma's kitchen but it's the latest from SMEG. Despite its coloured facade, our testers found it to have very basic features (the freezer even has to be manually defrosted), the worst overall score in its size range, plus an inflated price tag of \$4390. It also used over 30% more energy than the label claims.



HOW RELIABLE HAVE SUBSCRIBERS FOUND THEIR FRIDGES?

Fridges are comparatively reliable overall. Over 6250 subscribers told us about their fridges (bought in or after 2000) in our last reliability survey, and 9% of them had needed repair in the previous 12 months.

Below are the results for brands for which we received enough replies to report on (at least 100). The number in brackets shows the number of responses. A difference of 8% or more is meaningful.

All fridges (6286)	91
Westinghouse (1806)	93
Kelvinator/Electrolux (608)	92
LG (456)	92
Samsung (294)	92
Fisher & Paykel (2072)	91
Whirlpool (272)	88
GE (132)	84
Maytag (162)	83

USING THE TABLE (overleaf)

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Ease of use: 20%
- Temperature performance: 40%
- Energy efficiency: 20%
- Crisper freshness: 8%
- Fresh-food cooling: 12%

Noise level These are comparative measurements. Fridges can sound noticeably louder as the compressor starts and stops and may make unusual noises during automatic defrosting.

Claimed volumes These tell you how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment.

10-year running costs These are calculated at a rate of 15 cents per kWh. A 10-year period gives a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy use — and you should be able to expect your fridge to last at least that long.

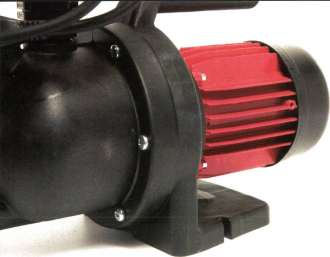
TABLE NOTES

- # Newly tested models.
na Not applicable; the doors are side-by-side.
Rev Reversible door.
(A) Discontinued, but may still be available in some shops.
(B) We generally test the basic white version of a model. Fridges with this footnote are available in other styles and finishes. Some can also be built into cabinets with a door kit that matches your kitchen cupboards.
(C) New crisper and/or freezer bins have been added since our test, which may slightly affect their scores.
(D) This chiller was too warm in our tests for optimal storage of highly perishable foods.
(E) Freezer only, not fresh-food compartment.
(F) Fresh-food compartment only, not freezer.
(G) Bottom two compartments only, not fresh-food or freezer compartments.
(H) Freezer/fridge price.

PRODUCT		PERFORMANCE									
Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	Freezer	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Temperature score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Crisper freshness score (%)	Fresh-food cooling score (%)	Cooling time (hr:min)	Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	Noise level (dB)	Ice made / held (kg)
LESS THAN 300 L											
# LG GN-205SQA	Top	68	66	70	79	44	62	6:52	395 / 416	38	
# Mitsubishi MR-H290S (A)	Bottom	58	58	56	71	72	32	7:57	520 / 552	35	
Samsung SR281NW	Top	57	68	44	82	32	53	6:31	414 / 445	43	
# Fisher & Paykel E249T	Top	54	63	39	87	36	43	7:38	387 / 374	34	
300-375 L											
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E372B (B)	Bottom	77	72	72	84	95	76	4:14	498 / 482	35	
Fisher & Paykel Tasman E331T (B) (C)	Top	76	71	68	91	90	78	4:13	407 / 388	36	
Westinghouse RJ362V	Top	71	70	64	82	84	67	5:02	439 / 493	38	
Electrolux ETM3600WB	Top	67	70	52	86	78	70	4:44	439 / 449	39	
Whirlpool 6WMV35NW	Top	65	63	63	92	43	45	6:33	389 / 387	38	
# Smeg FAB32	Bottom	61	54	60	86	88	17	8:53	348 / 461	29	
376-450 L											
Westinghouse Virtuoso RJ423V	Top	80	76	81	82	84	80	3:44	468 / 523	37	
Fisher & Paykel Tasman E381T (B)	Top	79	71	77	90	80	81	3:42	433 / 424	35	
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E440T (B) (C)	Top	78	76	73	92	73	82	3:33	476 / 437	36	
Westinghouse Virtuoso RJ393V	Top	78	73	80	79	82	75	4:14	466 / 530	37	
Fisher & Paykel Tasman E442B (B) (C)	Bottom	76	76	72	84	92	68	4:40	583 / 527	36	
Westinghouse RJ422V	Top	75	73	71	86	80	69	4:39	455 / 477	39	
451-525 L											
Westinghouse Virtuoso RJ525V (B)	Top	80	79	82	81	80	77	3:52	507 / 590	37	
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E521T (B)	Top	78	72	76	89	75	82	3:24	508 / 496	35	
Electrolux EBM5100WB (B)	Bottom	75	67	77	80	87	62	4:58	589 / 602	39	
Fisher & Paykel Elegance E522B (B)	Bottom	73	75	69	78	78	69	4:29	596 / 642	37	
Westinghouse RJ522V	Top	73	76	66	83	80	69	4:28	508 / 569	40	
MORE THAN 525 L											
# Fisher & Paykel RF610A	Bottom	77	65	78	79	92	78	3:42	695 / 688	37	0.5 / 2
Samsung Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW (B)	Bottom	73	72	64	88	74	79	3:39	604 / 576	40	
GE GBU20KBRWW	Bottom	72	71	62	89	84	71	4:12	572 / 555	43	
SIDE-BY-SIDE											
Westinghouse WSE6100WA (B)	LH side	77	73	76	79	76	81	3:26	687 / 705	41	
Whirlpool 6ED2FHKXRL	LH side	74	77	72	88	90	39	6:07	614 / 595	41	
# Whirlpool 6GDS5HGXS	LH side	74	77	76	90	85	32	6:27	740 / 639	41	1.5 / 4
# Bosch KAN58A40AU	LH side	72	73	71	74	77	63	4:47	750 / 758	38	0.5 / 1
# Samsung SRS752QDUS	LH side	72	72	66	75	91	75	3:48	866 / 873	35	2.0 / 3
# Maytag GZ2826GEKBS	LH side	68	74	56	84	84	61	4:47	819 / 709	43	2.5 / 3
Samsung SRS535NW	LH side	64	74	45	83	66	78	3:46	602 / 605	36	
# LG GR-G227TVS	LH side	62	69	43	76	75	85	3:02	679 / 748	35	1.5 / 2
PIGEON PAIR											
Miele F 456 i-2 + K 855 iD-1	R or L	74	64	77	87	60	70	4:32	503 / 508	32	
Westinghouse FJ362V + RP432V (B)	R or L	71	69	71	74	70	69	4:13	969 / 918	41	

FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS							COSTS	
Crisper drawer	Dairy	Door hinge position	Remove shelves with door at 90°	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Contact	10-year running costs (\$)	Price (\$)
1		R	✓ (E)	148 x 54 x 60	205	142	63	www.lge.com.au	624	624
1		R	✓	162 x 56 x 65	290	175	115	www.mitsubishielectric.com.au	828	799
1		R		157 x 61 x 63	281	197	84	www.samsung.com.au	668	699
1	✓	Rev	✓ (E)	161 x 53 x 58	248	191	57	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	561	809
2	✓	R or L	✓	160 x 64 x 70	373	250	123	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	723	1449
1	✓	Rev	✓	143 x 64 x 69	329	232	97	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	582	1019
1	✓	R or L		164 x 70 x 65	364	273	91	www.westinghouse.com.au	740	1059
1	✓	R or L		164 x 70 x 65	364	273	91	www.electrolux.com.au	674	1059
1		Rev	✓	167 x 60 x 77	350	270	80	www.whirlpool.com.au	581	1099
2	✓	R or L	✓	180 x 61 x 68	348	211	137	www.smeg-australia.com	692	4390
1	✓	R or L		164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	www.westinghouse.com.au	785	1749
1	✓	Rev	✓	161 x 64 x 70	380	283	97	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	636	1179
1	✓	R or L		161 x 69 x 70	447	342	105	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	656	1641
1	✓	R or L		172 x 70 x 65	393	302	91	www.westinghouse.com.au	795	1479
2	✓	Rev		170 x 67 x 71	442	307	135	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	791	1705
1	✓	R or L		164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	www.westinghouse.com.au	716	1379
2	✓	R or L		172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	www.westinghouse.com.au	885	1799
1	✓	R or L		170 x 80 x 71	517	400	117	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	744	1907
2	✓	R or L		172 x 81 x 71	505	349	156	www.electrolux.com.au	903	1749
2	✓	R or L	✓	170 x 80 x 71	519	360	159	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	963	1960
2	✓	R or L		172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	www.westinghouse.com.au	854	1689
2	✓	na	✓ (E)	178 x 91 x 69	614	433	181	www.fisherpaykel.com.au	1032	3599
1		R		180 x 83 x 73	551	361	190	www.samsung.com.au	864	1899
2	✓	Rev	✓	173 x 76 x 83	588	388	200	www.kleenmaid.com.au	833	3899
2	✓	na		176 x 90 x 71	606	357	249	www.westinghouse.com.au	1058	1899
D) 1	✓	na		170 x 84 x 78	640	415	225	www.whirlpool.com.au	893	2499
D) 1	✓	na	✓ (F)	178 x 91 x 79	740	445	295	www.whirlpool.com.au	959	3799
1	✓	na		180 x 91 x 69	603	377	226	www.bosch.com.au	1137	2999
1	✓	na	✓ (G)	179 x 92 x 86	752	347	293	www.samsung.com.au	1310	5999
D) 2	✓	na		179 x 92 x 79	737	469	268	www.maytag.com.au	1064	7499
2	✓	na		173 x 86 x 67	535	316	219	www.samsung.com.au	908	1799
1	✓	na		176 x 90 x 75	613	378	235	www.lge.com.au	1122	7498
2	✓	Rev	✓	140 x 112 x 55	441	258	183	www.miele.com.au	762	1999 / 2199 (H)
1	✓	R or L	✓ (E)	173 x 145 x 65	791	434	357	www.westinghouse.com.au	1377	1569 / 1459 (H)

Newly tested models.



Pump up the volume

There's a rainwater tank renaissance! To get the best out of your tank, you need a good pump.

nutshell

- All the pumps are easy to use and most of them work well.
- Get expert advice before installing a rainwater tank and pump, to make sure you get the right setup for your needs.

Years of drought have focused our attention on saving water, and the humble rainwater tank, which once almost vanished from suburbia, is enjoying a renaissance. It's now reappearing in force, so much so that tank suppliers are struggling to keep up with demand. In 2006 almost 7% of Australian households installed a rainwater tank or greywater system, and even more are planning to do so in the next year.

If you install a tank, you'll usually need a pump as well, to power your hose or domestic water supply. CHOICE tested 17 (15 external pumps and two submersibles that go inside the tank) to see which deliver the best water flow through a standard garden hose — for watering plants or washing the car, for example. Garden watering is one of the most popular reasons for installing a tank and pump.

Some of these pumps are also suitable for powering a domestic water supply (to a laundry and toilet, for example), but that's a complex setup that can vary

considerably between different homes, so we didn't test them for that use. If you want to go down that road, consult an expert tank/pump supplier and a plumber.

Go with the flow

We tested for pumps that deliver the best flowrate (the most litres of water per minute), as these will help you water your garden quickly and effectively. Water pressure from the pump is also an important factor, but more so if you're using the pump to power your domestic water supply than simply watering the garden.

The best models pumped out 15–17 litres per minute in our test setup. For comparison, a typical domestic tap manages 15–18 L/min (less for a low-flow or aerating model) and a standard showerhead around 15–25 L/min.

Installing a pump

None of the pumps in this test came with the necessary fittings and hose to connect them to a water tank. You

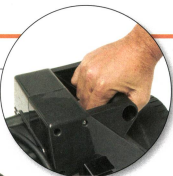
What to look for

USEFUL FEATURES

- Pumps that turn on and off automatically when you turn on the tap (or hose) are easiest to use. You'll need a pump of this type if you connect it to indoor plumbing.
- Other pumps must be switched on or off manually, which is easy to do, but can be inconvenient.
- Multiple outlets on the pump allow you to run more than one hose, or a hose plus a plumbed-in connection.
- Run-dry protection prevents motor damage if the rainwater tank is empty.
- Submersible pumps are generally quieter than external pumps, as the water in the tank muffles their noise.

GETTING MORE INFO

Discuss your particular needs with an expert, such as a speciality tank and pump supplier. They should be able to recommend a tank and pump to suit you.



CARRY HANDLE

A carry handle is useful if you need to move the pump between different sites, but isn't necessary for permanent installations.

have to buy those separately; the supplier should be able to recommend the right fittings.

You'll need a weatherproof power point for the pump; if there's none close to its location, have one installed by an electrician. Don't connect the pump via an extension cord to an indoor power point, as this might not be weatherproof and could be unsafe.

All the pumps in this test are easy to install. For the external pumps, you just connect the pump inlet to the rainwater tank using a short piece of kink-resistant hose, secured with two hose clamps. The distance between tank and pump should be as short as possible. Next, prime the pump with water, plug the pump into the power and switch it on. Then connect a hose to the outlet and you're ready to start watering.

For the submersible pumps, connect the outlet to your garden hose, then lower the pump into the tank (the ONGA Dominator came with a length of rope for this purpose) and plug it into the power supply. Don't use the power cord to lower or raise the pump.

Ideally, you should put a housing or cover over an external pump to protect it from the weather and muffle its noise. Most of the pumps in this test are about as noisy as a loud vacuum cleaner, and some have a high-pitched whirr that could be annoying. >



You can buy water tanks in all colours, shapes and sizes to suit all different kinds of backyard. Photo courtesy of www.sydneytanks.com.

About the rest

The other pumps had lower flowrates, but were mostly still OK at 10–14 L/min. You'd probably be reasonably happy with most of them. The one exception is the RIVAFLQ, which only achieved a very slow 6 L/min.

We also tested the ALDI Garden Pump Gardenline AGFWP-800, which is now no longer available. Its flowrate was 14 L/min; it scored 75% and at \$99 was good value, so if you bought one, you got a good deal.

What to buy

GARDENA 4000/5 Jet

PRICE \$379

TYPE External

- Doesn't start and stop automatically.
- While it's noisier than the other models, it's not especially annoying.



BEST BUY

GRUNDFOS MQ3-45

PRICE \$763

TYPE External

- Heavy and bulky and has no carry handle, but this wouldn't be a problem if it was permanently installed.



ONGA Dominator 4" 75/35 P3200100

PRICE \$623

TYPE Submersible

- Doesn't start and stop automatically.



BIANCO PUMPZ BIA-INOX 80PC

PRICE \$463

TYPE External



DAB PUMPS DAB-JINOX62MPCX

PRICE \$701

TYPE External



DAVEY HP45-05T

PRICE \$720

TYPE External



GRUNDFOS JP Basic 2 PC

PRICE \$490

TYPE External



When you install a rainwater tank, check if you're entitled to any rebate or other cost savings.

Installing a tank

There are plenty of good reasons to install a rainwater tank, even in areas that aren't drought-affected. You will:

- Reduce your consumption of mains water and save money in the long run.
- Reduce stormwater runoff into drains, rivers and oceans.
- Harvest clean rainwater, which can be better than mains water for your plants and appliances, as it's less salty. Many people think rainwater tastes better than mains water, too.

First, check with your local council and water supplier for any regulations in your area. You might need a building application, or there might be restrictions on the size and location of the tank. Pumps might have to conform to noise regulations.

Also check whether you're eligible for any rebates or other cost savings. Most states and some city councils offer rebates for installing a rainwater tank, but conditions apply. For example, in NSW the tank must be at least 2000 L in capacity to qualify for a rebate, and additional rebates apply if you connect the tank to your toilet or washing machine.

Your roof and gutters might be a consideration, especially if you plan to drink the rainwater. Older painted roofs might contain lead. If you live in an area with heavy traffic or industry, pollution settles on the roof and runs into the tank. Make sure your gutters have guards to stop leaves and other matter getting into the collected water, and consider installing a first flush device to stop the initial run-off (which will contain roof contaminants) from entering the tank.

Many water suppliers and health authorities recommend you don't drink rainwater from a tank if you have access to mains water — possibly just to be on the safe side. However, public health studies in SA (the state with the highest rainwater usage) haven't identified a link with illness. So if it smells, tastes and looks fine and isn't too close to heavy traffic or other pollution, it's up to you.

Choosing a tank

There's a wide range of sizes, shapes and even colours to choose from; talk to a few tank suppliers and shop



around for a good price. If you've got limited space, a slimline tank at the side of your house, like the one pictured above, can be a good option. Others include underfloor bladders and modular tanks.

As a general rule, bigger is better: you'll be able to harvest more water when it rains, have more available for the dry times, and often you'll get a better rebate too. Sydney Water recommends a minimum size of 2000 L for basic usage such as a toilet connection or garden watering, and at least 5000 L for tanks supplying water to both the toilet and washing machine. But you'll probably still be reliant on mains water; a typical four-person household uses around 7000 L of water per week.

Once you've chosen a tank, you'll need to prepare the site. Choose a location out of direct sunlight if possible, to reduce evaporation from the inspection holes. You'll usually need a concrete slab or a tank stand for the tank to sit on, and if you're connecting it to your bathroom or laundry, you'll need professional plumbing. ■

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand / model (in rank order)	Flowrate score (%)	Measured flowrate (L per minute)	9 L buckets filled in 1 minute	Noise	Carry handle	Outlets	Pump starts and stops automatically	Run-dry protection	Measured power (W)	Weight (kg)	Contact	Price (\$)
Gardena 4000/5 Jet	90	17	1.9	Noisier	✓	2			1000	10.0	www.nylexwater.com.au	379
Grundfos MQ3-45	90	17	1.9	Typical		1	✓	✓	880	13.0	www.grundfos.com.au	763
Onga Dominator 4" 75/35 P3200100 (submersible)	85	16	1.8	Quiet		1			540	9.3	www.pentairwater.com.au	623
Bianco Pumpz BIA-INOX80PC	80	15	1.7	Typical	✓	1	✓	✓	670	8.2	www.whiteint.com.au	463
Dab Pumps DAB-JINOX62MPCX	80	15	1.7	Typical		1	✓	✓	670	8.6	www.whiteint.com.au	701
Davey HP45-05T	80	15	1.7	Typical		1	✓	✓	640	9.4	www.davey.com.au	720
Grundfos JP Basic 2 PC	80	15	1.7	Typical		1	✓	✓	710	11.8	www.grundfos.com.au	490
Claytech Bluetron 100	75	14	1.6	Typical	✓	1	✓	✓	560	8.8	www.claytonengineering.com.au	395
Davey SJ35-04PC	75	14	1.6	Typical		1	✓	✓	530	7.9	www.davey.com.au	430
Onga SMHP450	75	14	1.6	Typical		1	✓	✓	610	9.2	www.pentairwater.com.au	753
Onga Tankbuddy OTB450A (submersible)	75	14	1.6	Quiet	✓	1		✓	650	7.0	www.pentairwater.com.au	490
Dab Pumps DAB-KPS30-16MPCX	70	13	1.4	High-pitched		1	✓	ns	430	6.7	www.whiteint.com.au	471
Gardena 3000/4 Jet (A)	70	13	1.4	Typical	✓	2			560	6.1	www.nylexwater.com.au	269
Leader Econonic 90	65	12	1.3	Typical	✓	1	✓	✓	550	7.2	www.claytonengineering.com.au	349
Onga SMH 350	65	12	1.3	Typical		1			410	6.6	www.pentairwater.com.au	425
Bianco Pumpz BIA-TECH40PC	55	10	1.1	Typical	✓	1	✓	✓	400	7.2	www.whiteint.com.au	278
Rivaflo TFM30	35	6	0.7	High-pitched		1	✓	✓	370	6.7	www.pentairwater.com.au	424

USING THE TABLE

Score The score is based on the measured flowrate.
Features See *What to look for*, page 60, for more on these.

TABLE NOTES

ns Not stated.
 (A) Discontinued, but may still be available in shops.

HOW WE TESTED



- The inlet side of each pump was connected to a 500 L water tank, and the outlet side to a standard 30 m, 12 mm diameter garden hose with a spray head. The water flowrate and

pressure achieved by a pump can vary depending on the size and elevation of the water tank, among other factors. The results in this test therefore only apply to our particular setup, but it's likely many installations will mimic it, with tank and pump on the same level and one hose directly connected.

- Our tester pumped water into a second tank mounted on a set of scales. The amount of water pumped was measured over three two-minute runs and averaged.
- Each pump was rated for noise. Due to high background noise in our test area, the noise wasn't recorded in decibels; instead our tester gave each pump a comparative description. He also noted if the noise was particularly high-pitched or otherwise annoying — you might not hear it, but your neighbours could suffer.
- He also measured how far some of the pumps could squirt water from the hose, but there weren't big differences between them, so he didn't test them all. He checked the top and bottom-ranked pumps, plus one in between. The equal-top-ranking GRUNDFOS MQ3-45 squirted water 10.9 m, while the bottom-ranking RIVAFLO managed 9 m, and the middle-ranking DAVEY SJ35-04PC 10.7 m.

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on 02 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD ■ Gold Medal Snacks has recalled **Prawn Crackers, Crispy Prawn Snacks**, 50 g, all best-before dates up to and including 14 FEB 08.

The problem It contains gluten, which isn't declared on the labelling.

What to do Don't eat it if you suffer from a gluten allergy or intolerance. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 02 9725 4855.

BANDAGES ■ The Children's Hospital at Westmead, NSW, has recalled **Banded Bear Stiffle Adhesive Bandages**, sold in Woolworths and Food for Less stores.

The problem The pin that holds the lid onto the tin containing the bandage comes loose, and is a hazard.

What to do Return the bandages to any Woolworths or Food for Less store for a refund, or call 02 9845 3367 for more information.

POOL ACCESSORIES ■ UGames Australia has recalled the following Thomas & Friends pool items: Swimming Vest, PG50-20285; Baby Float, PG50-20281; Kick Board, PG50-20288; 50 cm Swimming Ring, PG50-20287; 55 cm Swimming Ring, PG50-20286; Swim Set, PG50-055, which includes a kickboard, beach ball and armbands. All items were sold since August 2006.

The problem Packaging and/or product labelling doesn't satisfy the requirements of the Australian standard.

What to do Return the items to UGames Australia, 10 Apollo Street, Warriewood 2102, including your return postal details, to receive a refund. For more information email kathryn@ugames.com.au or phone 02 9997 2044.

TOOTH PASTE ■ Challenge International has recalled **Tri Leaf Spearmint Toothpaste**, 145 g, manufactured in September 2005, batch number 070905, sold at various discount shops between September 2005 and March 2006.

The problem The toothpaste contains a chemical called diethylene glycol.

What to do Don't use it. Return it to Challenge International, PO Box 42, Southland 3192, to receive a replacement.

BLINDS ■ Ikea has recalled **Ikea Bambu blinds**, 160 cm long, and available in five widths (60, 80, 100, 120 and 140 cm). The article numbers are 20093550, 00093551, 80093547, 60093548, 40093549.

The problem They allegedly don't comply with some state regulations and they pose a strangulation hazard from the cord.

What to do Take the blinds down. Return them to any Ikea store for a refund, or for more information go to www.ikea.com.au.

TV ■ Sharp has recalled **Sharp 42" LCD television**, model numbers LC42BX5X, LC42GD7X and LC42PD7X, serial numbers from 610700001 to 705799999

inclusive, purchased between 1 February 2007 and 21 May 2007. The model and serial number are printed on the identification plate on the rear of the TV. TVs with a green dot on the identification plate have already been inspected and modified, and aren't affected by the recall.

The problem A small piece of foam shielding may become free of its mounting and make contact with the power board. This could cause overheating and/or create a live voltage on the frame of the TV, creating the risk of electric shock.

What to do Turn it off and disconnect the power. To arrange for an inspection and modification, call 1800 333 435 between 7 am and 7 pm, seven days a week, and have your model and serial number ready. You can also go to www.sharp.net.au.

PHARMACEUTICAL ■ Novartis Pharmaceuticals, following a direction from the Therapeutic Goods Administration, has recalled **Prexige** 100 mg tablet blister pack, AUST R 128635; 200 mg tablet blister pack, AUST R 104279; and 400 mg tablet blister pack, AUST R 104280.

The problem Several cases of serious liver side effects, including two deaths and two cases requiring liver transplants, were reported in patients taking Prexige (lumiracoxib). See also page 4.

What to do Stop taking it, and contact your GP for an assessment and to seek advice on an alternative treatment. Remain vigilant for any possible liver side effects, including yellowing of the skin and/or eyes, and darkening of urine or pale bowel motions. Contact your GP immediately if you notice any of these side effects. Return any full or partial packs of Prexige to a pharmacy to receive a refund. For more information call 1800 671 203.

DOWNLIGHT ■ Spectra Lighting has recalled **RLM Carson Surface Mounted Downlight**.

The problem Powder coating may have covered the three body section fixing positions, compromising the earth continuity between the body and the reflector housing.

What to do A qualified electrician needs to check the light. Call 1800 635 383 for more information.

MEDICINE ■ La Viva Blue has recalled **Top Gun for Men**, 750 mg tablets, 2 x 750 mg per box, all batches, expiry date Dec 2008.

The problem It contains an analogue of tadalafil, a prescription-only medicine, which could give rise to serious health consequences, especially for people with existing medical conditions such as heart conditions.

What to do Stop using it. To obtain a refund return any unused portion, with details of its purchase, to La Viva Blue, PO Box 524, Bankstown 1885.

BICYCLE ■ Gemini Bicycle Centres has recalled **Mongoose bicycles**, models 2007 Tyax Comp (black), 2007 Wing Sport (black) and 2007 Otero Comp (grey). The models feature a Suntour XCM fork with batch numbers C060901 to C061030, which is printed behind the fork crown. They were sold after 30 September 2006.

The problem The fork may come apart.

What to do Contact your local Mongoose dealer, or for more information go to www.mongoosebikes.com.au/information.

CAR JACK ■ Lifestyle Brilliance Australia has recalled **Highlander 12 V electric car jack**, model LTO-800, sold between the internet by Lifestyle Brilliance, Overstock Outlet and Deals Direct since 9 May 2007.

The problem It doesn't comply with the requirements of the Australian product safety standard.

What to do Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

CAR ■ Ford has recalled **Ford WX Fiesta** vehicles, built between 12 October 2006 and 24 October 2006. You'll find the date of manufacture on the identification plate under the bonnet.

The problem The steering column could have been damaged by inappropriate handling prior to vehicle production.

What to do Owners should be contacted by mail, or for more information call 1800 503 672.

CAR ■ Mazda has recalled **Mazda 3**, built between 22 May 2006 and 29 March 2007. VIN range JMOBK10320030010-JMOBK103200358229.

The problem Under certain conditions, the No 4 engine mount securing bolt may loosen. This could allow the engine and transmission assembly to drop down.

What to do Contact your nearest Mazda dealer, or for more information call 1800 034 411.

CAR ■ GM Holden has recalled the following **AWD Holden models: Adventra, Crewman Cross 6, Crewman Cross 8, HSV Avalanche, HSV Avalanche XUV, One Tonner Cross 6**. Vehicles within the following ISOVIN range are affected: VY model 6G1YM####L112420 to 6G1YM####L980953 and VZ model 6G1ZM####L251262 to 6G1ZM####L903903. The # represents an alpha or numeric character not relevant to determining the affected vehicle.

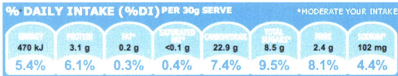
The problem The front brake hose may develop a leak, resulting in reduced braking effectiveness.

What to do Owners of affected models should be contacted by letter, or contact your nearest Holden dealer service department to arrange for rectification. For more information call 1800 632 826, 8 am to 7 pm EST, Monday to Friday, and Saturday 9 am to 1 pm EST.

+ FOOD LABELLING

Nutrition info

Which one do you find easier to use? The 'traffic light' labelling system proposed by the UK Food Standards Agency, above right, or Kellogg's Daily Intake labelling, right.



Any new labelling system should help as many consumers as possible to choose healthier foods.

Some food manufacturers are now placing nutrition information on the front of packs. But have you ever wondered what's prompted them to do it?

Given the rising rates of overweight and obesity in Australia, the primary aim of any new labelling scheme should be to help as many consumers as possible to choose healthier foods — and particularly to make it easy for those from low socioeconomic groups.

In 2004, the UK Food Standards Agency developed a voluntary 'traffic light' labelling scheme, in which a series of red, amber or green lights would appear on the front of food labels to indicate if a food has high, moderate or low levels of total fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt.

Some supermarket chains and manufacturers adopted this scheme, but a few big multinational companies, including Kellogg's, Nestlé and Kraft, took a different approach. They developed a system that lists the extent to which a serve of a product contributes to the Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) of calories, total fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt.

While the traffic light labels use a combination of colours and numbers to help consumers make a judgment about how healthy a food is, the GDA system displays a series of percentages and leaves it to you to determine how healthy a product is in the context of your overall diet — check out the examples of each, above, and see which you think is easier to understand.

In 2006, Kellogg's launched its Daily Intake labelling here — the Australian equivalent of the GDA scheme. The Australian Food and Grocery Council encouraged its member companies to adopt a similar scheme, perhaps pre-empting any traffic light approach in Australia.

Observing these changes in the marketplace in Australia and overseas, Australia's food and health ministers last year commissioned a review of all forms of front-of-pack labelling and the consumer research behind them. CHOICE hopes the result will be approval for the scheme that helps consumers most — not the one that appeals most to food manufacturers because it does the least harm to their bottom line. ■

+ PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Generic drugs: cheaper but just as effective

The National Prescribing Service (NPS) recently conducted a campaign with the key message that generic medicines are just as effective. When a pharmaceutical company develops a new medicine it takes out a patent, which allows it exclusive rights to make and sell the drug for a period of time. After the patent expires, other manufacturers can make medicines with the same active ingredient. These are called generics: they have the same effect as the brand-name equivalent but are usually cheaper — and they're just as safe.

When prescribed a medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist if there's a generic alternative; if there is, most people can use it. However, some experience a rare allergic reaction to different inactive ingredients that may be in generics.

CHOICE has long supported the use of generic medicines. Some will save you money at the pharmacy; others will cost you the same, but the Federal Government will save money on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), which provides consumers with access to a large number of medicines at an affordable price. The cost of the PBS has been growing rapidly and the government has tried to control the cost by increasing the amount the consumer pays (called a co-payment). By using generic medicines you'll be helping to control the cost of the PBS and make large increases in the co-payments less likely.

For more information on CHOICE's campaign to ensure consumers have access to affordable medicines, go to www.choice.com.au/pbsreform. ■

By using generic medicines you'll be helping to control the cost of the PBS.



choice.com.au

Get the reports you want,
when you want!



UPGRADE &
SAVE!

Upgrade to CHOICE Plus and get full access to choice.com.au — the perfect companion to your magazine.

Gain instant access to:

- Hundreds of product and service reports.
- Bonus tests and individual reports from CHOICE Computer.
- Interactive product comparison tools.
- Easy-to-use interactive features.
- Finance and investment calculators.

Personal CHOICE magazine subscribers only can upgrade for just \$12.50 per quarter (normally \$18.95).

JOIN NOW!

Go to **choiceextra.com.au**
and follow the prompts

CHOICE team

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Peter Kell. **Executive assistant** Georgina Salts. **DEPUTY CEO** Norm Crothers. **EDITORIAL DIRECTOR** Anny Friis. **CHOICE Editor** Jane Mackenzie. **Senior copy editor** Kerri Tyler. **Writers/Journalists this issue** Birgitt Baader, Chris Barnes, Karina Bray, Candice Chung, Rachel Clemons, Alan Dooley, Steve Duncombe, Bellinda Dunn, Holly Enriquez, Ella Kennedy, Kim Laurie, Uta Mihm, Liz Munn, David Oakenfull. **Content generation** Chris Barnes, Rachel Clemons, Alan Dooley, Bellinda Dunn, Denis Gallagher, Michael Hohl, Uta Mihm, Liz Munn, David Oakenfull, Martha Psiroukis, Chris Ruggles. **CHOICE ONLINE Manager** Linda Magee. **Chris Ruggles**. **Editor** Katie Leach. **Glenn Mason, Amira Meyer, Seth Mortensen, Elizabeth Tournasatos**. **PRODUCTION Manager** Darrell Sly. **Creative director** Cynthia Nge. **Art director** Michelle Havenstein. **Photographer** Gene Ross. **TESTING AND BUSINESS OPERATIONS General Manager** Norm Crothers. **RESEARCH AND TEST CENTRE Manager** John Ashes. **Laboratory Manager** Klaus Neuscheler. **Jo Bektash, Antonio Bonacruz, Geoff Day, Joseph Ho, Peter Horvath, Mohamed Jawahir, Fiona Mair, Scott O'Keefe, Neill Patterson, Benjamin Rossetto, Ryan Shaw, Norbert Suto, James Thomson, Petr Valouch**. **Buying** Dorothy Kneale, Sonja Scodeller. **Research** Tina Hendrikson, Christine Shaday, Joe Sydney. **Test Research** John Ashes. **CONSUMER SERVICES Manager** Bill Stuart. **Darran Ashton, David Hill, Silvana Ristevska, Alice Richards, Katrina Zivkovich**. **FINANCE** Vivien Power. **Jeanette Dwyer, Kang Zhu Ge, Sera Raicama**. **ADMINISTRATION** Gail Slaviero. **LIBRARY** Shirley Colless, Ruben Reyes. **ICT Manager** Stephen Macdonald. **Ferdous Azad, Charles Ly**. **SUBSCRIPTIONS Manager** Bill Stuart. **Supervisor** Nootaya Hwang. **Co-ordinator** Thelma Bracken. **Lynda-Maree Morgan, Fiona Pollard, Phasathorn Woottiartorn**. **MARKETING AND COMMUNITY General Manager** Mary Harris. **COMMUNITY RESEARCH Manager** Lara Matkovic. **Katherine Rock, Stephanie Tye**. **MARKETING** Zac Godkin, Jasmine Hughes. **QUALITY AND HUMAN RESOURCES General Manager** Barbara Manchester. **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CONTROL Manager** Pam Gardiner. **Assistant Manager** Corinna Horrigan. **Verifiers** Ben Bridges, Sharon Cauduro, Tracey Clancy, Will Farrier, Stuart Gilchrist, James Haggerty, Karen Palmer, Alister Sharp, Melanie Stopic. **POLICY AND CAMPAIGNS General Manager** Gordon Renouf. **MEDIA** Christopher Zinn. **POLICY** Elissa Freeman, Clare Hughes, Michael Johnston, Catherine Raffaele. **Campaigns Co-ordinator** Lizzie Ball. **Marketing statistics** supplied by GfK Marketing Services. **Financial data** supplied by Cannex.

'No commercial use' policy Our ratings and reports may not be used in advertising or for any other commercial purpose. CHOICE will take all steps to prevent commercial use of its materials, its name, and the name of its publications and products. Please report any apparent violation to CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204; phone 02 9577 3399; fax 02 9577 3355; email ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

Permissions Reproduction of CHOICE, CHOICE Books and other CHOICE publications, in whole or in part, is forbidden without prior written permission (and is never permitted for commercial purposes).

Address requests to CHOICE Consumer Services at the address above.

Your privacy We're committed to protecting your privacy, and abide by Australia's National Privacy Principles. We never sell or give our mailing lists to other organisations. If you'd like to read our privacy policy, it's on our website or we can send you a copy.

All literary and artistic works and compilations of information are the subject of Australian and international copyright © Australian Consumers' Association 2007. CHOICE™ is a trademark of the Australian Consumers' Association. All rights reserved.

COUNCIL MEMBERS The Australian Consumers' Association is governed by an honorary council elected by the voting members. (For information about voting membership, call 02 9577 3399.) Members of the council give their time without reimbursement, and are not engaged as principals in industry, advertising or sales. **Council:** Chair Jenni Mack. **Deputy Chair** Joan Staples. **Members** Robin Brown, William Davidson, Rachel Dixon, Sandra Milligan, Ian Spight, John T D Wood.

The Australian Consumers' Association is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. ACN 000 281 925. ABN 72 000 281 925. Registered office: 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, Australia.

How to use this index

Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, unbolded type indicates other articles.

* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

Air conditioners	Oct	Dog leads, retractable	Dec	Heaters		Pumps for rainwater	
portable	Nov	Drugs, prescription prices	Dec	convection	Jun	tanks	Nov
large split-system	Nov			gas, unfueled	May		
small split-system	Jun	DVD/hard disc recorders	Nov	High chairs	Jul	Ranges, dual-fuel,	
Airline satisfaction	Jul			Home and contents		90 cm	
Anti-aging cosmetics	Jul	Ebay, buying tickets on	Aug	insurance	May	Real estate, find an agent	Oct
Appliance reliability	Sep	Electricity, green	Jun	Home theatre systems	Jan/Feb	Refrigerators — see Fridges	
		Espresso machines	Mar, Jul*	Hospital insurance	Aug	Restaurant hygiene	Nov
		Ethical investing	Sep	Hygiene in restaurants	Nov	Reverse mortgages	Mar, Apr
Baby food	Jul	Exercise equipment					
Bank penalty fees	Jul, Sep*	cross trainers	Jan/Feb	Insurance		Sausages, gourmet	Nov
Barbecues, AA	Dec, Mar*	treadmills	Oct	car	Nov	with PVR	May
Batteries, AA	Aug			home and contents	May	Shoes, cost comparison	Oct
Beer, premium	Aug	Factory outlet shops	Nov	hospital	May	Shopping online vs in-store	Nov
Blower fans	Sep	Fairtrade, buying	Nov	Internet/phone bundling	Aug	Showerheads,	
Breadmakers	May	Family tree software	Jan/Feb	Investment, ethical	Sep	water-efficient	Mar, Apr*
Breakfast cereals	Jan/Feb	Fans, ceiling	Sep	Juice, açai, goji, noni, etc	Sep	Shredders, paper	Mar
Build-billing		First aid, natural	Mar	Juicers	Nov	Sofa beds	Aug
		Flights, carbon offsets for	Jul			Sparkling wine/champagne	Dec, Jan/Feb*
Camcorders	Dec	Flu vaccinations	Apr, Jul*	Landline, do you need one?			
Cameras, digital	Apr, Oct	Fluoride in water	Mar	10 fat foods	Jan/Feb	Strollers	Sep
Cameras, digital		Food		baby food	Jul	four-wheel	Apr
flights	Nov	10 fat foods	Jan/Feb	breakfast cereals	May	three-wheel	Apr
home	Nov	cheddar cheese	Oct	chocolates	Dec	Supermarket	
Carpet cleaning	Jun	cream and substitutes	Sep	diet cola	Apr	'own brands'	Nov
Cars		diet cola	Apr	meat, free-range	Mar	price survey	Jul
ANCAP crash tests	Mar	meat, free-range	Mar	milk	May	pricing	Apr
child car restraints	Mar	olive oil	Jun	Mascara	Jan/Feb	Telephones — see Phones	
GPS navigation systems	Jan/Feb, Aug	organic food	Aug	Meat, free-range	Mar	Television	
insurance	Nov	parmesan cheese	Jul	Microwave ovens	Jun	66 cm	Oct
tyres	Sep	Sausages, gourmet	Nov	Milk	May	80 cm	Apr
used car safety	Jan/Feb	vegetables, fresh vs frozen	Nov	Mobile phones	Sep	101-107 cm	Jul
Ceiling fans	Sep	vs canned	Apr	Mobile phone repairs	Jan/Feb	106 cm	Dec, Jan/Feb*
Cereals, breakfast	May	vegetables, frozen mixed	Aug	Moisturisers with sunscreen	Oct	digital TV explained	Dec
Champagne/sparkling wine	Dec, Jan/Feb*	yoghurt	May, Nov	MP3 players	Mar, Sep	set-top boxes	May
		Fridges, mixed sizes	May, Nov			with PVR	Apr
Cheese		Gadgets, useless	Jan/Feb	Nanotechnology	Jul	Throat lozenges	Jun
cheddar	Oct	Gas heaters, unfueled	May	Nappies	Apr	Tickets, buying on eBay	May
parmesan	Jul	Genealogy software	Jan/Feb	Natural first-aid treatments	Mar	Travel money	Oct
Child/baby concerns		GP, choosing	Jan/Feb	Noise-cancelling		Treadmills	May
baby food	Jul	GPS car navigation systems	Jan/Feb, Aug	headphones	Aug	Tyres	Sep
car restraints	Dec	Graters	Mar			Unit pricing	Apr
high chairs	Apr	Green power	Jun	Olive oil	Jun		
nappies	Sep	Grinders, coffee	Jul	Online vs in-store shopping	Nov	Vacuum cleaners	
strollers, four-wheel	Apr	Hair colour, grey coverage	May	Organic food	Aug	Jun, Jul*, Oct	
strollers, three-wheel	Sep	Hair removal	May	Ovens		Vegetables	
water safety products	Dec	home	Sep	dual-fuel ranges, 90 cm	Oct	fresh vs frozen vs canned	Apr
Chocolates	Dec	professional	Jun	microwave	Jun	frozen mixed	Aug
Coffee grinders	Apr	Headphones, noise-	Aug	wall/under-bench, electric	Apr	Walking poles	Aug
Cola, diet	Jun	cancelling	Aug			Wall/under-bench ovens,	Apr
Convection heaters	Jan/Feb, Jul	Health	Jan/Feb	Paper shredders	Mar	electric	Apr
Cordless phones	Jan/Feb, Jul	bulk-billing	Jan/Feb	Parmesan cheese	Jul	Washer/dryer, steam	Aug
Cream and substitutes	Sep	choosing a GP	Jan/Feb	Pet food	Jun	Washing machines	Mar, Sep
Credit from stores	Dec	dental costs	Jul	Phone/Internet bundling	Aug	Water-efficient home	Oct
Cross trainers	Jan/Feb	flu vaccinations	Apr, Jul*	Phones		Water-efficient showerheads	Mar, Apr*
Currency conversion fees	May	fluoride in water	Mar	cordless	Jan/Feb, Jul	Water safety products for	Dec
		laser eye surgery	May	mobile — see Mobile		children	Dec
		natural first-aid treatments	Mar	phones		Wedding dress, buying	Jan/Feb
Dental costs	Jul	prescription prices	Dec	Pillows, buying guide	May	Wine, sparkling	Dec, Jan/Feb*
Detergent	Jan/Feb	throat lozenges	Jun	Portable air conditioners	Oct	Yoghurt	Jun
dishwasher	Jan/Feb			Power, green	Dec		
laundry	Apr			Prescription prices	Dec		
Diet cola	Apr						
Digital camcorders	Dec						
Digital cameras	Apr, Oct						
Digital players	Mar, Sep						
Digital TV explained	Dec						
Dishwasher detergents	Jan/Feb						
Dishwashers	Jan/Feb, Aug						

Contact us



Subscribers' helpline

Contact us for advice on all consumer issues

PHONE 02 9577 3399

FAX 02 9577 3377

Subscription prices

PERSONAL SUBSCRIPTION:

1 year \$78, 2 years \$145.

FOR COMPANIES/INSTITUTIONS:

1 year \$125, 2 years \$239.

Email us

Send in your questions for our experts to answer or just share your consumer experiences.

EMAIL ausconsumer@choice.com.au

Write to us

CHOICE

57 Carrington Road,

Marrickville 2204

Use CHOICE Shopper

Call 1300 360 655

All you need is the model name and number of what you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine).

Use CHOICE extra

www.CHOICEextra.com.au

Free website with CHOICE articles from Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs of many of them for quick and easy reference.

No need to find that back copy! To use this website, log in with your subscriber number.

Join CHOICE.com.au

www.choice.com.au

For an extra \$12.50/qr, CHOICE magazine subscribers can access hundreds of test reports and articles on finances, food, health, computing, cars, and products and services for babies and children. You'll also find lots of interactive tools to help you choose products.

The prize for best entry goes to M Prime for the Aussie ostriches. Thanks also to R Metz, R MacGregor, L Norwood, G Chambers, P Elks, P Hendy, M Sulzberger, J Crabbe, M Chalmers, M Farmer, T Jones, G Frauenfelder and M Howie for their contributions to this month's Hard Word.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.

See great European cities without leaving North America!

Would that be Paris, Ontario, and Prague, Oklahoma? Cruising Missouri (by bus) from Amsterdam to Budapest?

Canada and Alaska

21 Days **\$6995*** per person, twin share
from only

Add \$750 port charges and \$90 fuel surcharge

Your fully inclusive holiday features:

- 3 nights quality accommodation in each Paris and Prague
- 14 night cruise from Amsterdam to Budapest
- Comprehensive sightseeing of all major towns
- 49 fine meals — all meals included on board ship
- Services of a Travelmarvel Cruise Director
- Arrival and departure transfers on first and last day

NEW ZEALAND
On Sale!
Fare breakthrough continues!
Now extended to October 2008!
HOLIDAY WONDERS OF AUSTRALIA

Has someone from Foreign Affairs been messing around with Wikipedia?

How did we miss New Zealand becoming part of Australia?

Kangaroos, platypuses, koalas and ... ostriches?

See, this is the trouble with buying imported 'Australian' souvenirs...



So basically you're paying \$10 for an empty plastic bag.

Bean Bag Filler
100L. Filling not included.
Was \$19.99. Now \$9.99. 16% OFF \$10.00 ea.



S&K Car Park Management Pty Ltd.
ABN 94 106 043 689

Entry and use of Car Park is subject to Parking Conditions displayed at entrance and throughout Car Park.

If Parking Conditions are not accepted, proceed directly without delay to nearest exit. © 2008 S&K Car Park Management Pty Ltd.

Please press otherwise it's payable.

Note: No warranty as to the security of this car park is expressed or is to be implied by use of the word "Secure" in our trading name or logo.

Please do not leave ticket in your car

If you thought parking your car in a **SECURE** parking station would be guaranteed secure, well, you'd be wrong.

grocery bargains
99c. save \$50.

Apparently these chocolate bars are usually \$50.99...